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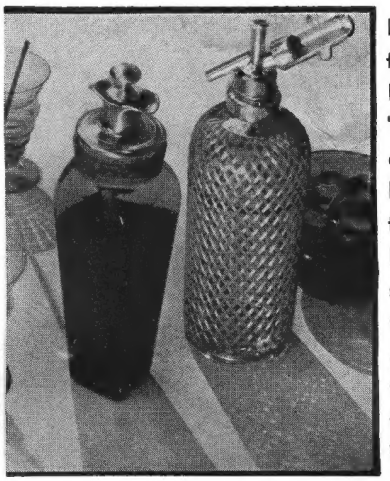

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By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

Author of "The Dance of The Scarlet Leopards"

HONORS of WAR

CHAPTER I

THE CAVALRY MOVES OUT

THE air was like wine. It was the sort of morning—September in northern New York—to make me glad I was a second lieutenant of cavalry riding at the head of a troop of some seventy men. The snorting of the horses up and down the long column, the clink and jingle of sabers and bit chains, the creak of saddle leather and the thud of multitudinous iron shod hoofs at the trot, blended in a rhythm to which I found myself unconsciously humming a tune as we wound swiftly along the twisting track of the narrow country road.

Not only was the morning ideal, but the mission upon which we were engaged held its thrill. For we were part of the cavalry screen of the Blue Army, flung out against the Red Forces marching up from the south. We had the added satisfaction of marching on an indepen-

dent mission, being a contact troop sent forward to gain touch with the enemy and discover the whereabouts of his main body.

It was only mimic warfare, with nothing but blank ammunition—twenty rounds of it—at each soldier's belt and a blue band about his hat to differentiate him from his foe, but it was fascinating work just the same. Your true player will strive just as earnestly to win the pot whether the chips represent pennies or dollars. The game's the thing.

Bobby Neal was my first lieutenant, commanding the troop, and we two spanked along at a steady trot, rising and falling to the smooth gait of our horses, casting an occasional glance at the long, undulating column behind us; then turning again to study the country in front.

We were approaching a belt of woods into which the white road disappeared about eight hundred yards beyond. Bobby suddenly blew a short blast on his bronze whistle, throwing his arm up in a curve over his head at the same instant. The long column quivered throughout its length. It was as if an unseen wave had rippled down through it—a wave that spent itself at the rear —and the seventy horses slowed to the walk.

That little ripple and the instantaneous response meant proper timing of the signal and good march discipline; not a horse closed up on the animal ahead, not a single set of fours was out of alignment. The same four-foot distance between head and croup was maintained at the walk as it had been at the trot as the column continued to move forward.

"Dick, we're about on schedule," Bobby remarked. "On the far side of that belt of woods we'll run into the advance units of the Red Cavalry, probably a troop. They will be about two thousand yards away from the forest, coming on. The rest of their squadron will be right smack on their tails, not more than two or three hundred yards in rear. Take a patrol and gallop through to the far edge of the trees and verify what I've said. I'll wait here with the troop."

"Yes, sir," I replied and, turning, signaled the first set of four to come on at a trot.

As soon as they had cleared the column, I strung them out in a sort of diamond formation and lifted my sorrel into a gallop. And what a gallop! No horse but a thoroughbred can approximate that easy, tireless, effortless stride that seems to carry one floating over the ground.

My men thudded along before and behind, and in short order we were entering the tunnel-like opening in the forest. Looking back, I saw the troop dismounting, the guidon drooping on its staff making a splotch of scarlet and white against the background of green fields, gray stone walls, golden-brown horses and olive-drab men.

We flew along the road, our horses' hoofs making scarcely a sound on the black earth and the thick carpet of fallen leaves. It struck me that Bobby's estimate of what lay ahead was pretty far fetched. How the dickens could he know the strength of the enemy outfit in front, what formation they would be in and how far they would be along the road? While I had a great respect for Bobby as an exceptionally keen officer, it seemed to me that his prophecy about the enemy was too extreme, and I decided to take no chances.

In another few minutes we were close to the far side of the wood, where the road entered open country again. I approached this very carefully, dismounting under the shelter of the trees and moving forward, field glasses in hand. Arriving at last at a place where I could see what lay ahead, my eyes immediately picked up a flash of color and the shimmer of sun on moving objects. Leveling my glasses upon them, a troop of cavalry, its men wearing dark red hat-bands, leaping into my field of vision.

They were coming along slowly, about two thousand yards away. A few hundred yards behind them trailed a long column of horsemen. It was a simple matter to count the guidons—three of them there were, each carried at the head of a troop.

The sight made me marvel a little at Bobby's uncanny way of figuring out the enemy's moves; but there was no time to gape and wonder. In another few seconds I was mounted and galloping back to report.

BOBBY did not seem in the least surprised. He turned to the troop, blew his whistle and waved his hand, palm upward, a few times; whereat each soldier squared away with one foot in the stirrup. He seemed to have lifted every man into the air by an invisible string, so smart was their instantaneous response, as the seventy settled into their saddles and straightened out in column.

I was still wondering how Bobby had so exactly forecast the strength, position and formation of the enemy, when he turned to me.

"Our job is to get through and find their main body. Send a message back to the squadron commander, telling him what we already know."

I drew my pencil and message blank out in a jiffy from my map case, and in another minute had the message written and sent. Bobby moved the troop out at a trot, swung them to the left off the road and led them through a field, heading toward the woods at a point about three hundred yards from where the road dived into the tunnel of trees. Next he moved them into the woods, the troopers circling around tree trunks and fallen logs until they were back out of sight. When he had them well back under the trees he gave the signal, "Fight on foot," with his clenched fist.

Men swarmed off their horses in a second, forming up on foot with their rifles.

Waving to us to follow, he led the dismounted troop back to the edge of the woods at a steady dogtrot, flung them out into a line of skirmishers at the edge of the field and dropped them on to their stomachs behind a stone wall.

He glanced at his watch and gave the command to load. There was a brisk clatter of breech blocks and a tinkle of cartridge holders, succeeded by silence as every man lay waiting.

"I thought we'd tickle them up a bit. It will teach them a lesson about moving so compactly in enemy country," said Bobby.

"Good enough," I acknowledged. "But how the dickens did you figure out so exactly how many of them there were, and where they were to be found?"

"Simple enough," he answered, keeping his eyes on the tunnel-like entrance to the forest from which the Reds might be expected to issue at any minute. "I studied the map, timed my march, figured out where the Reds would most likely start their forward movement, estimated their rate of march, and that was all."

"Yes," I answered doubtfully, "I can see that; but I don't know how you figured out their formation and strength."

He grinned. Bobby had a most attractive grin when he wanted to reveal it.

"Not so hard as it looks," he explained. "Just a little common sense. The Reds have only two squadrons of cavalry."

This was correct. The Nth Cavalry had been split to furnish the mounted troops for both sides; two squadrons of the regiment had been assigned to the Red force, while our squadron was assigned to the Blues.

"Who commands them? Old Dobie Itch Preston commands the First Squadron. He's senior, and therefore he'd command both squadrons. Who's next senior? Captain Willie Brant—"

A great light broke upon me, and I laughed. Almost anybody who ever knew Captain Willie Brant knew what

he would do under any set of circumstances. Captain Willie Brant was one of those individuals who can always be depended upon to do the wrong thing in any emergency. Being junior in rank, naturally he would be sent forward in charge of the Red contact squadron.

"It's so simple when it's figured out," I said.

"Of course, it's simple," returned Bobby. "War is the most simple game in the world. It's only professional military men who make it complicated."

He looked up suddenly and listened.

"I think our friends are coming. I'll bet you a month's pay that Captain Willie will be right on the tail of his advance point. He read in a book of regulations that a cavalry command must move with point and flankers. It never occurred to him that a point and flankers are for the purpose of protecting the main body against rifle and machine gun fire. There they are!" He pointed to the entrance to the forest.

Two mounted men, their hats bound with bands of red cloth, their rifles carried across their saddles, came trotting out from the shadows of the trees. They moved off down the road, glancing indifferently about.

CHAPTER II

BLANK CARTRIDGES

WE CROUCHED behind our concealment as the two Red scouts continued their progress. Some ten yards behind them came another man who glanced behind him from time to time. In another minute a little clump of four men led by a young officer came into view. I recognized the officer —young Harris, a shavetail just out of the Point. His four men debouched in couples to the right and left, two of them coming toward us on the hillside.

This was a ticklish moment. If these two flankers spread out far enough, they were sure to discover us and give the alarm. I must have shown my worry, for Bobby shook his head.

"No fear," he whispered. "They won't come all the way. Look, what did I tell you?"

It was true. The two flankers, after moving about a hundred yards up the hillside toward us, swung their horses parallel with the road and moved along the front of our position too far away to discover anything amiss. Another clump of horsemen had issued from the woods, and right behind them rode a tubby little officer whose short legs and long body proclaimed him as Captain Willie Brant. Bobby had certainly called the turn on him!

Following him came the squadron, a compact column of men riding in sets of fours, making a pretty picture with their olive-drab and bronze and the red hat-bands; also making a beautiful target.

Bobby watched them silently until the rearmost troop had passed across the front of our position. There they were—nearly three hundred men and horses—in battle sight range.

Bobby turned to his concealed men and called an order.

The hillside awoke to life in a sudden roll of rifle fire. It rippled and flashed along the top of the stone wall, making a devilish clatter and racket. Below us the squadron of the enemy halted, the soldiers gazing about them like a flock of geese. Captain Willie Brant sat his horse, staring at our position with his mouth open in amazement. Some troop commander, the one nearest to us, shouted an order for his men to dismount—under fire! Another one commanded, "Fours left! March," and tried to move his troop away at a gallop. In a few seconds the squadron was milling about uncertainly.

We heard Captain Willie Brant's high pitched voice shouting orders and then countermanding them. The third and farthest troop drew sabers, the steel weapons flashing in the sun as the troopers swung about and came riding toward us slowly in line. The rifles kept

up their angry chatter until suddenly Bobby blew, "Cease Firing!" and the roar and rattle died away.

A whistle blew authoritatively from somewhere. Two umpires—staff officers wearing white bands about their hats—rode up the hill toward us. The disorganized squadron below rested in place. The umpires rode up, looked over our dispositions, made some notes and turned back again to Captain Willie Brant. Here they conferred a moment or two; then we saw an order go to the rearmost troop of the Red squadron. Its commander saluted, looking very discontented, and mounted his men.

This troop, looking more than disconsolate, removed their red hat-bands, turned fours about and moved toward the rear. They had been ruled out of action. Personally, I thought that the casualties would have been much heavier had we been using real bullets; but, at any rate, in our first brush with the enemy we had reduced his strength by one-fourth.

With the umpires' permission we mounted and rode on in our original direction.

"Pretty snappy work!" I grinned as we moved into the forest behind our advance guard.

"So-so—so-so," returned Bobby absently. "It was like taking candy from a baby."

He was the least cheerful of any one in the troop, for I could hear the men laughing and chuckling over the victory, all of them as elated as I was. But Bobby seemed almost morose. I taxed him on this, and he told me the reason.

"It's the uselessness of it all," he complained. "What does it all amount to? Take the German army for example. One error like that on maneuvers, and the officer concerned would be given his yellow ticket as unfit to command troops in war.

"What happens to Captain Willie Brant as a result of this morning's proof of his inability to command men in battle? Nothing. It won't even appear on his record."

"Do you mean to say that this little job you pulled this morning won't appear on your record?" I asked, startled.

"Of course not," he said somberly. "No one will know except you. Maybe the umpires will casually tell the Old Man, and he'll pat me on the back. But on my record, no."

"But what the devil is an officer's efficiency record for, if it doesn't show his skill as a battle leader?"

My amazement must have shown in my voice. I had always taken the efficiency record for granted and had never particularly bothered my head about it, in spite of its important bearing upon an officer's future career.

"In the first place, it isn't an efficiency record. Efficiency is a positive thing, and the records kept of us are mostly negative. If you are court-martialed for some breach of regulations, depend upon it that that will go down on your record. But if you successfully handle a troop for years, and your troop consistently outrides, outshoots and outmaneuvers other troops, that important fact will never be noted."

Bobby spoke with a trace of bitterness. I had never heard him make such a long speech. But what he said amazed me so that I rode along in silence for some time.

"So Captain Willie Brant, who is a fiend for regulations, whose men laugh at him behind his back, and who can't lead a troop away from the picket line, would have a better official record than some officer who could really lead men in battle?" I asked at last.

"Of course, he would!" returned Bobby. "He'll go high in peace time. Let war come, and he'll be picked to lead thousands of trusting civilians into battle. And the enemy won't fight with blank cartridges in the next war!"

"But how about the officer who really can lead men in battle?" I asked.

"It will take from one to two years of war, useless slaughter and defeat before he will be able to work up from the

lowly position he will occupy. But it is doubtful if he will even be in the Army. Our regular Army tends to eliminate the real leaders, who either resign and get into civil life where energy and brains win rewards—or, if they remain, break too many regulations in an effort to accomplish something."

Months later I was to remember that conversation—every word of it. But at the time I thought that Bobby was a little sore and exaggerated matters. We rode along in silence for awhile, a subdued and joyous murmur coming from the men behind us. They were enjoying the field maneuvers, that was plain to be seen; but I doubt if they were enjoying them half as much as I was.

Whatever element of unreality the sham problems held was dissipated for me by the fact that the whole of Europe was up in arms that Summer. France, Germany, England and Belgium were battling from the Channel to the Alps; the air was full of war and rumors of war; and I felt that it would be only a matter of time until we were in it up to our necks.

OUR advance guard was waiting for us at the far entrance to the woods, and I rode forward to reconnoiter while Bobby and the rest of the troop came along behind.

From my vantage point I could see for nearly two miles in the enemy direction, and could make out a low-lying cloud of dust hovering over the road. Focusing my glasses upon this, I caught the glint of steel and saw the shuffling progress of a body of enemy infantry. Bobby came up and examined it through his glasses, but could not tell any more than I could whether it was the enemy main body, or some sort of flanking or advance group.

"Only way to find out is to go and see," he said.

We returned to the troop and, mounting up, moved forward, throwing out a screen of scouts who ranged far and wide on our front and flanks. Bobby and I rode well behind them, keeping the troop in view in rear ready to heed our signals.

The road was very dusty, but Bobby did not intend to have our presence betrayed by it. He lengthened the troop into column of twos and split it lengthwise, making the resulting two columns of troopers ride single file on either side of the road in the grass. Thanks to this, we moved forward very swiftly without any high dust cloud to herald our progress.

There was still another squadron of cavalry out in front somewhere; and the possibility of running into it kept us on the alert. We had lost sight of the enemy infantry in the meantime, but were steadily nearing the point where we had last seen it. We must have made about a mile and a half when one of our flanking groups signaled from below a hill crest on the right at about eight hundred yards' distance. The troop was halted, and we waited while one of the men of this group rode in at a gallop, leaving his two companions watching something on the far side of the hill beyond the crest.

The scout rode up and reported a column of infantry moving along a side road. He was unable to tell its strength, so I dismounted and wigwagged a query. The answer came back—

"Two companies in sight." Which was a little information, but not all that was needed.

Just about that time a man galloped in from the point ahead, reporting that a large force of infantry was coming in our direction down the road on which we were marching. The situation was clear enough. The two companies reported on the right were undoubtedly a flanking body, while the main body was coming down the thoroughfare on which we stood.

This was the supposition. It had to be verified before a message went back. We moved forward cautiously. I went ahead to join our point—two men and

a sergeant—who were halted about eight hundred yards ahead as the messenger informed me.

My way led through a wooded area of several acres and out again through fields to the crest of a small hill. Approaching this, I found the horses of the point and left my own horse with my orderly. Proceeding on foot, I joined the noncommissioned officer, who was stationed ten or twelve yards ahead, gazing down the road from behind the shelter of some bushes. He pointed silently to the front.

Coming toward us up the road, which wound through a small valley, I saw the main body of the enemy.

CHAPTER III

ON PATROL

THE leading men of the infantry advance were not more than six hundred yards away. It would be nip and tuck to get out of there before they arrived and discovered us hurrying to the rear. Hastily returning to the horses, we mounted and galloped back to the troop. As we sped along I signaled to the flankers to come in, and they converged on the troop as we rode in. Bobby took my report without comment, hastily scribbled a message to the squadron commander far in the rear and dispatched two copies of it by different messengers.

This duty done, he galloped the troop off the road to the left and moved through the woods, paralleling the route of the enemy, until he reached a point about opposite where the main body of the enemy would be coming up the valley. Here he turned the troop over to me and, taking a couple of men, galloped away to the right, climbing the hill which sheltered the valley from us. I moved along at a walk, watching for his signal.

It was not long in coming. He signaled, "Line"; and I gave, "Fours right! March!"

The troop wheeled like one man from column into line, moving toward Bobby, whom we could see above us on the hill crest. He signaled, "Gallop!" and we sped up the slope like a wave. Not until we were within a few yards of the top did he halt us, signaling, "Fight on foot!"

The galloping horses were pulled down on their haunches. Men leaped from the saddles, rifles in hand, the No. 4's in each set remaining to hold the horses. The line of dismounted men crouched down and crawled up to the hill crest. I was slightly ahead of the line, and peered over to see that we were directly above the enemy infantry, which marched along the road, not five hundred yards away, totally oblivious of danger.

In a few more seconds we cut loose into their close packed column with a sudden rattle of rifle fire. It was a beautiful range and a beautiful target. The infantry column halted uncertainly, men gazing around to see what all the shooting was about. Whistles blew, and we heard orders shouted. Slowly and ponderously the heavy infantry columns backed off the road and sought the shelter of a ditch and a stone wall on the opposite side.

A crackle of return fire began to rattle along their front, while orderlies and messengers galloped about like mad, field officers came up and waved their arms, umpires appeared, beginning to debate and take notes. When the excitement was at its height, Bobby picked up his troop again, ran them down to their horses and into the saddles and set off at a gallop toward the rear of the infantry column. When he had reached a point near the end of the infantry column he dismounted the troop and repeated the attack.

By this time the infantry was in motion; and this new attack again started them on slow and ponderous retaliatory movements. Waiting until they had reached the height of their defensive measures, Neal swung us out of there still headed toward the rear.

A few hundred yards farther on he came to the last straggling detachments of the main body and attacked the trains. This time we remained in the saddle and rolled down the hill like a steel crested avalanche, arriving suddenly among a milling crowd of four-line teams, escort wagons, frightened infantry guards and cursing teamsters. It was a mild mêlée for a few minutes until Bobby, fearful that some overzealous cavalryman might use his sword, sounded the rally on the far side of the road.

Mounted men broke out of the trains from between every team and wagon, galloping toward Bobby in what seemed to be the wildest disorder. But as they converged on him the straggling riders closed into the wavering semblance of a rank; the line steadied down; the men began to count fours as they slowed to a trot and in a few seconds the troop was reorganized.

We trotted sedately over the crest of the hill and out of sight just as an extremely angry looking column of infantry came back at the double time from the forward main body.

We were now on the opposite side of the infantry command, which was all of two regiments. Somewhere in the rear I heard the clank and rattle of artillery hurrying forward just as we moved out of sight. So far it was a glorious bit of work. The infantry had been attacked flank and rear by what must have seemed to them an overwhelming force of cavalry, shooting into them from widely separated points almost simultaneously.

They were now trying to resume the march and were at last beginning to extend and strengthen their flanking detachments. This was slowing them up, so Bobby swung the fire of our troop into them again and again as he moved forward toward the head of their column. I doubt if they made more than a quarter-mile advance in the hour we buzzed about them like hornets.

The artillery came up halfway through the column, moved out where we had last been seen and unlimbered. But we were gone before their spade trails were embedded in the soil, galloping toward the front.

But now the sport was getting too dangerous. The infantry column was too well aroused, their flanking detachments were too far out and too heavy, and we were in danger of getting boxed in by those two companies out somewhere on this flank. Also, there was danger of the arrival of the enemy cavalry at any moment.

Bobby headed back toward our own lines, circling around the two flank companies, leaving the infantry far behind us still ready to repel another attack from us as far as we knew.

The men were gay and exultant in spite of their hard running about. It was just the sort of lightning quick movement to capture the imagination of an American soldier; and the troop was ready to swear that Lieutenant Bobby Neal was the best cavalry officer who ever wore spurs.

AS WE moved along, two of our scouts brought in a mounted messenger from the Red force. We shamelessly mulcted him of his message and found that it was from the commander of the Red forces to the commander of his advance cavalry, ordering him to hold the river crossing ahead at all costs until the arrival of the infantry main body.

Bobby's eyes fairly glittered as he read this. He drummed his fingers thoughtfully on the pommel a moment as he considered this new phase. Then, with an elated ring in his voice, he shouted:

"Trot! E-e-e-yo-w-w-w!"

Then he led us forward.

I knew that river. It was not a large stream—not much more than a good sized creek—but pretty deep in spots and fordable only at selected points. It lay across our route no more than a mile and a half ahead. Evidently Captain

Willie Brant had sent a message from that point asking for instructions, and this was the reply.

"Go on ahead, youngster, and spy out the lay of the land. I'll continue moving along this road, and you can report back here to me," Bobby ordered.

I moved out with two men, settling my horse into a smooth, steady gallop as we rapidly pulled away from the troop. It was not long until we had passed through the screen of our scouts and were alone, moving rapidly toward the enemy on our front.

It was time for tricky work, so I didn't gallop ahead without pausing. Instead, I stopped at each high point and remained concealed while I busily scoured the country ahead with my glasses. If their powerful lenses disclosed no enemy, we galloped on to the next point and repeated the process. This method had the advantage of permitting one to see the enemy before being seen.

At our third halt we sighted a lone Red trooper galloping toward us. A quick signal to the men, and we crouched back under the shadows of the trees in a small dip in the road. Nearer and nearer came the pounding hoofs, and in another minute the man was among us. We held his bridle reins in a jiffy and had him out of the saddle. He was cleverer than the former messenger we had captured, for he had his message rolled into a tiny ball and tossed it into the underbrush when he saw he was captured.

"Snappy work!" I complimented him, much to his surprise. But he had done the right thing.

We found the paper after a few seconds' search; I spread it out, smoothing the wrinkles, and read it. It was from Captain Willie Brant:

> Am holding river line from Duggan's Mill to Hill 236.

This was good news. We knew exactly where Willie Brant's squadron could be found.

CHAPTER IV

REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

WHAT to do with our prisoner was rather a problem. I couldn't spare a guard for him; but I didn't want him to get away and disclose the presence of our troop.

"Shoot him, sir," suggested my corporal gravely, which brought a grin from all of us, including the prisoner.

But the grin quickly faded when I announced the solution I had for the problem. We took his horse away from him, with the promise to return it to his troop at the close of the day's maneuvers, and left him seated at the side of the road, somewhat disconsolate. The man whom I had sent with a message to Bobby led the spare horse, and we others went on our way.

It didn't take me long to locate Willie Brant's squadron. The first thing we saw were his led horses—the entire three troops of animals—not linked in sets of fours, mind you, with one man to lead each set, but circled by platoons with one man holding the reins of some twenty horses. In other words, Willie Brant had immobilized the led horses, and his men would have to return to them on foot instead of having the horses brought up to them. Evidently Willie Brant had no fear of attack from the rear, for he hadn't a single guard out on our side.

I circled quietly around the clump of more than two hundred horses and edged off the road. Dismounting, I left my horse with the corporal and crept through a thicket of underbrush toward the river bank. In front of me I could hear voices as I approached a stone wall ahead.

On the opposite side of this wall was a farmhouse on the river bank. In the yard sat Captain Willie Brant. With him were his squadron adjutant and another officer.

Along the river bank at the far side of the house was a line of dismounted men, spaced at intervals of two or three yards.

Creeping away, I sought Brant's reserve, but could find no trace of any organized body, although I worked through the trees for several hundred yards. Evidently he had extended his entire three troops along the river bank, and was intending to hold it in this fashion.

Carefully making my way back to the corporal, we mounted and dusted back to the troop which was now in hiding only a few hundred yards to the rear, the horses and men concealed in the woods while Bobby and a sergeant kept a lookout for me.

I made my report quickly.

"Wham!" Bobby made a motion as of casting dice. "Boy, they're our meat!"

He turned and ran into the woods. I followed as he gave orders for the troop to move out, leading their horses through the trees, until we were about a hundred yards in rear of the led horses of Captain Willie Brant's squadron.

Here we halted, and Bobby snapped out his commands.

Things began to happen. Our own horses were left under a small guard. I took two platoons of dismounted men and slid forward with them to where the horses of the enemy were clumped in big circles. It was no trick at all to leap in among them, grab every man and seize the horses. Moving quickly but quietly, so as not to frighten the animals, we led the horses back to our troop and lengthened them out in column ready for a quick move.

In a few minutes we heard voices, and there came Bobby and his platoon, leading no less a person than Captain Willie Brant! Not only had they captured him, but his adjutant and a lieutenant from another troop as well.

"But this is most disgraceful!" Willie Brant was spluttering as he came along. "I'll report you for this and prefer charges against you, Mr. Neal!" he threatened.

Bobby said nothing, but only gave orders for every one to mount. It was rather tricky work getting out of there with that excess of led horses, but we managed it pretty quickly, with each trooper leading as many horses as he could handle.

The animals were well trained cavalry mounts and made little trouble for us, which was lucky. Getting out of the woods, Bobby led the long column, burdened with prisoners and horses, about a thousand yards down the road where he found a big field. Leading the way across, he came to a dip in the ground forming a depression large enough to conceal the entire outfit.

Into this we went. One platoon was detailed as horseholders and guards for the prisoners, and left in charge of a sergeant with all the led horses circled in clumps. Taking the two remaining platoons, Bobby quickly led us out again and back to the river bank.

"Never try to protect a long line like a river bank by extending your command into a thin red line of heroes," advised Bobby.

"How would you do it?" I asked.

"A thin screen of patrols, supplying in mobility what they lack in strength, a support or line of supports behind them, and a reserve in rear of all to hurry to any seriously threatened point," he explained. "Now watch what happens!"

LEADING across the rear of the Red position, he swung in behind their right flank, forming his troop into line in the shelter of the trees. Right in front of us, not more than a hundred yards distant, was the single line of the right troop, its men loafing and lounging, most of them seated or prone, but all of them spaced two or three yards apart.

Bobby gave the signal to charge, and suddenly we were galloping across the intervening space. So silently did we roll forward on the carpet of fallen leaves that they were unaware of our approach until we were almost upon them. It was a walkaway. Startled at the sudden appearance of a mass of Blue

horsemen in their rear, they milled about uncertainly, firing an occasional shot. A lot of them leaped into the water to avoid the hoofs of the horses.

The enemy was thoroughly demoralized. Some semblance of order had been achieved on the right flank where the troop we first attacked had been formed into a firing line; but they could not shoot at us because of the press of soldiers borne back upon them by our impetuous charge from the left. There was no head to the squadron—nothing but confusion and a lot of wild shouting.

About the time we started to withdraw, an umpire appeared on foot and halted us. Another one joined him. They both blew their whistles shrilly, which meant that every one was to stand in place.

It didn't take them long to find out what had happened. When they heard that we had captured the squadron commander and all the led horses they looked at each other and shook their heads.

"I think this damn squadron should be ruled out of action," growled one.

"Absolutely!" agreed the other.

We had the satisfaction of seeing the entire squadron marched back on foot to where we had their led horses. Captain Willie Brant was still spluttering and made an impassioned appeal to the umpires, who merely shook their heads and gave him no satisfaction. If ever there was a glum and sour looking set of men, it was that squadron as they removed their red hat-bands and headed back to camp, theoretically horseless, dead, wounded and captured.

In a few minutes the Blue advance arrived on the other side of the river, and we joined our squadron. We were flung forward later as an attacking force and held an advanced point until the arrival of our infantry.

It was a pretty position—the top of a field that sloped away to the road along which the Red infantry were coming. We had touched them up, and they were firing an occasional shot at us. Behind us I noticed a sour looking elderly officer mounted on a horse, studying us and the distant enemy.

Bobby went down the line, correcting the dispositions of some of his riflemen, and returned to where I was.

"You're dead, Lieutenant!" spoke up the sour looking old officer from behind us.

Bobby and I looked around in surprise.

"My Lord, it's Chiggy John!" he whispered to me.

Chiggy John was the nickname of a particularly unloved and unlovable inspector-general.

"You've exposed yourself unnecessarily under fire, Lieutenant. You're dead," croaked Chiggy John from his horse.

"Very well, sir," returned Bobby, and then he turned to me. "Take the troop, Dick. Watch the enemy artillery and get out of here before—"

"I told you you're dead, Lieutenant!" croaked the old fellow from behind us, indignation in his voice. "You can't give orders when you're dead!"

Bobby turned around with the most injured expression I have ever seen on the face of a human being.

"Can't I give my lieutenant my dying message, sir?" he asked in a pathetic voice.

Something like the nervous cackle of an excited hen broke forth from the men on the left and was as quickly stifled. A snicker came from farther down the line. Old Chiggy John turned red as a beet. He jabbed his horse viciously with his spurs and turned to ride away.

"Your facetious remarks are impertinent and entirely uncalled for, Mr. Neal!"

With that remark he was gone.

The day soon ended, contact having been established with the Red army and the dispositions of each side examined. That night came the usual critique, with all the officers of both sides present to listen to the strictures of the chief umpire and his aides. These conferences are usually rambling and boresome af-

fairs; but I was keenly interested, wondering what comment Bobby's share in the day's work would excite.

I must say they did him full justice, going at length into his first engagement with the Red squadron when he had crippled it seriously, taking up in detail his delaying action with the Red infantry and the results, and winding up with a regular panegyric on his victory over Captain Willie Brant's squadron.

His work was characterized as brilliant, and he received many congratulations from the colonel and the rest of us. Captain Willie Brant's share in the day's work was slurred over in silence; but certainly his incapacity for command was evident to every officer there.

LATE that night I came home to the tent which I shared with Bobby and found him sitting on his bed, smoking.

"How's everything?" I asked.

"Lovely!" he retorted, with a rather tired note in his voice, and pointed to an official looking envelop on the folding camp table. "Read that," he invited.

I picked it up and scanned it through. It was a regular official letter, originating with the inspector-general—old Chiggy John—addressed to our colonel. It stated baldly that Lieutenant Robert Neal had been guilty of disrespect and unbecoming facetiousness in his attitude toward the inspector-general, and ordered that disciplinary action be taken against him and that the matter be noted on his efficiency record.

"What did the colonel do?" I asked.

"What could he do? He called me in, heard my story, said he'd have to obey orders and that I must consider myself reprimanded. He was sorry, but it had to be noted on my efficiency record, although I could make such reply to it as I desired. What's the use of wasting time replying to such stuff?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"But won't anything be said about your work today on maneuvers? Surely that will go on your efficiency record!"

"Certainly not. The best that could happen would be that the colonel might give as his opinion that I'm a good officer. But that's nothing but an expression of opinion. Chiggy John's little remark will be considered a statement of fact that far outweighs it."

"And no official notice will be taken of Captain Willie Brant's mishandling of his command?"

"None whatsoever. He had only three hundred men to lead against blank cartridges today. Let us get into the War, and they'll give him a minimum of three thousand men to lead against real bullets. Wait and see!"

CHAPTER V

WAR

THE War was rending Europe at that time, giving a seriousness to these sham battles that they might otherwise have lacked. The maneuvers went on, but with a decided difference to my outfit.

The colonel transferred Bobby to Captain Willie Brant's troop. To say that I was gloomy was putting it mildly, even if I did fall heir to the command of my troop. But Bobby said never a word, although I know he was pretty blue at the prospect. In an archaic system of promotion by seniority such as still exists in our Army, some queer situations arise between capable juniors and inefficient seniors. And this was one of the weirdest that I had yet seen.

In the first place, Bobby was old and experienced enough to be commanding a troop independently. In the second place, he was everything that Willie Brant was not: a natural born leader who would have bent to his will any group of men, anywhere—a section gang, a ship's crew or a surveyor's outfit—and made them like it.

It would be hard to find Willie Brant's level in civil life, although I'm strongly of the opinion that he would have lived

out his career as a meticulous little clerk in a back office, dressed for the most part in a shiny black coat. It was certain that, did he not wear the twin silver bars of a captain on his shoulders, he would gain little respect from men anywhere.

After we were in different squadrons, Bobby and I saw little of each other. I met him several days later, and he was not especially happy looking. He was talking about resigning and joining the Canadians and going to France. I think what finally dissuaded him from this course was the fact that little cavalry was being used in France, and he loved cavalry work.

Afterward I met a sergeant who had been promoted to a commission from Willie Brant's troop. He told me of the daily friction that finally broke Bobby's heart. Willie Brant certainly hated Bobby from the start; not only as result of the capture of his squadron that day, but as a natural result of being a small minded man having power over a bigger man and better officer.

The ex-sergeant told me of Bobby's being called up on the carpet every day for some small violation of regulations: One day he forgot to initial a clothing allowance for a soldier; the next he was reprimanded because one of the men in his platoon had his oiler and thong case at inspection at the right of his rifle instead of the left, as required by some obscure regulation. And so things went on.

Just about that time I was ordered to the Philippines for my foreign service tour, and traveled across the Pacific to my new regiment. I lost all touch with Bobby then and heard no word of him. About a year later I ran into an officer of the old outfit, and he told me that Bobby had blown up one day when Captain Willie Brant had shown him a lot of unfavorable notations he was making on Bobby's efficiency report. There had evidently been some sort of row.

At any rate, Bobby was tried by court-martial, from which he received a reprimand. He immediately resigned. What had become of him? No one seemed to know. He had just dropped out. This was saddening news, for Bobby had come to represent to me my ideal of a *beau sabreur*—a gallant and capable officer who led men well.

The thought of Bobby recurred after we got into the War. I read that Captain Willie Brant had been promoted to a temporary brigadier-generalcy. Willie Brant a B-G! It seemed unbelievable. The new tables of organization were issued, and I noticed that an infantry brigade was something over nine thousand men, as I remember. Willie Brant, who couldn't handle a troop of cavalry of seventy men, was to be trusted with the lives of nine thousand soldiers and officers! It was criminal.

Months dragged along while America prepared to move her forces up to help the Allies—months in which the War Department forgot our existence out in the Philippines, although we went up automatically in rank, being in the Regular Army. Successive promotions from second lieutenant to first, from first to captain and from captain to major at last gave me my squadron. But it was as dust and ashes, since there seemed no possibility of getting out of the Philippines and into the fighting in France.

At last, after many weary months, when we read every day of new American units fighting in the front lines, a wild rumor began to circulate around the regiment.

There was much talk of an expeditionary force being sent from the Philippines to Siberia. Siberia was the nearest to us of any of the war sectors, being only a few days' sail from Manila.

The rumors crystallized into actuality when I received a confidential order to prepare myself for extended Winter service and report to Manila. I left on two hours' notice and, on arriving at Manila, found that I had been assigned to accompany the expeditionary force to Siberia. We sailed almost immediately and arrived in Vladivostok some days later.

WHAT a riot there was as we came into the harbor! It was filled with American and Allied warships, whose crews lined the decks and cheered us. The Czecho-Slovaks came down to the dock to greet us, and their band blared forth a welcome as we went ashore.

The streets were filled with officers and soldiers, of whom the Cossacks were by far the most picturesque—tall, booted and spurred cavalrymen, in their graceful flowing coats of blue and gold, cherry red and silver, olive green and scarlet, and every other imaginable combination of colors. They wore soft heel-less Russian boots on their feet and jaunty fur *khubankas* on their heads, and carried great jeweled swords and daggers. There were the Japanese, in slouchy, mustard colored uniforms, looking like keen little soldiers, nevertheless; there were French Annamites with jaunty little tam-o'-shanter caps; statuesque Italians; kilted Scots; snappy Czecho-Slovaks, and nonchalant French in horizon blue.

Not only were the Allies colorful and numerous, but Vladivostok was filled with officers of the old Russian Empire, driven out by the Bolsheviki but still wearing their colorful uniforms: Hussars, Dragoons, Cuirassiers, Engineers, including officers of the Imperial Bodyguard wearing uniforms of the famous Preobajensky and Ismailoffsky Regiments. But there was a trace of sadness in the gaiety; there is something melancholy about the breakup of a mighty empire and the wreck of all its glorious pageantry.

Affairs were in a chaotic state. The Bolsheviki were still threatening the railway—the Trans-Siberian—which was the ostensible reason for our being there. Siberia, a rich and fertile country, was being harassed by roving bands of Whites—survivors of the old régime—by bloodthirsty gangs of Reds, and by another force calling themselves the Greens, who warred indiscriminately upon Whites and Reds.

Nominally we were allies of the Whites. The nature of my own duties threw me a great deal into contact with the Russians. I ranged far and wide, going to the outermost limits of our control area, returning to report and be sent forth again.

It was upon my return from one of these trips that I repaired to our favorite Russian café where one could relax, listen to good music, see excellent dancing and study the officers of half the armies in the world at their pleasures.

While I was seated at my table this particular evening, every Russian officer in the place rose, bowed and stood at attention. Looking up to determine the cause of this, I saw a tall, bearded officer standing in the doorway. He was a splendid figure in scarlet and gold, with his sweeping Cossack coat glittering with jeweled orders, his gray fur *khubanka* set at a jaunty angle on his head, and his sword and dagger curved like fangs, the hilts richly embedded with cabochon emeralds.

"Who is he?" I asked Kreniloff, the Russian officer with me, a former captain of Hussars, now reduced by the exigencies of war and revolution to a *korunji,* or second lieutenant, of Cossacks.

Kreniloff had gone to the table of the new arrival, in company with every other Russian officer in the café, and had greeted him.

"O-ah, eet iss very high offitcer, werree famous cavalry leader. He hass the Croix of Saint George with the Golden Swords and everything. He hass been fighting in East Prussie during the War, and hass many famous victories. Indeed, yass. Hiss name eet iss Brodsky —verree woonderful offitcer—he hass command a brigade of Cossacki, also a division."

I gazed at the man with some curiosity and a great deal of respect. I had heard of the Russian cavalry operations on the Eastern Front, where some of the most brilliant cavalry battles of the War took place.

Mentally registering a vow to meet

this officer sometime and question him on these operations, I turned again to listen to the music; but another idea struck me.

"What is he doing here in Siberia?" I asked.

"O-ah, he iss—what you call it—ataman of Trans-Baikal Cossacks under Semionoff, but he iss independent command. Somewhere north he hass plenty of Cossacks."

The situation in Siberia had slowly been clearing in my mind during the last few weeks of work. There was Kalmikoff, ataman of the Ussuri Cossacks near Vladivostok; and Semionoff, ataman of the Trans-Baikal Cossacks near Chita. These two were supposed to be loyal to the Allies. So this new arrival must be a sub-ataman of Semionoff's.

Looking up suddenly, I found the eyes of the newly arrived Russian officer fixed on me. As I looked, he bowed slightly from the waist, and I bowed in return, accustomed by now to the courtesy of these Russian officers.

The music was good and the wine excellent. I looked forward rather sourly to heading forth tomorrow again on the insect infested trains for the long trip to Khabarovsk. That city on the Amur River marked the limits of our advance into Siberia to date.

Several American officers, whom I had not seen before, entered the café, and I remembered that a new force of infantry had come in since my last departure. Late that night I returned to my temporary quarters in the headquarters building in Svetlanskaya and as usual stopped for a chat and a smoke with the hard-working chief Intelligence officer.

"What's the matter, Colonel? You look perturbed," I said as I seated myself in the circle of light cast by his desk lamp.

"It's enough to make any one perturbed," he retorted, passing me his open cigar box. "My Lord, you should have seen the terrible looking gang of nitwits that reported to me today as assistant Intelligence officers! But that isn't the worst of it. Who do you think they sent over in command of this new regiment that arrived today? You'd never believe it, but they've sent a colonel who was formerly a temporary brigadier-general. He has been in France and lost about half his brigade in half an hour, so Pershing relieved him and sent him home. Now the War Department picks him up and sends him over here. As if we haven't enough deadheads!"

"Who is he, Colonel?" I asked casually.

"A Colonel Brant—they call him Willie Brant."

CHAPTER VI

STRANGE TRAVELING COMPANIONS

WILLIE BRANT over here—in command of a regiment of three thousand men! Of all the singular things I had ever heard his assignment out here seemed the weirdest.

"What are they going to do with him?" I asked.

"Do with him! What can they do with him? He's in command of a regiment and has to be sent out with it."

"But, my Lord! This new regiment is assigned to the worst sector to guard the railroad where the Bolsheviki are thicker than fleas!" I exclaimed.

"I know it," agreed the colonel glumly, shrugging his shoulders, "and things are pretty bad over here right now. The Japs are none too friendly—at least their friendliness goes up and down like a thermometer registering the degree of Allied success on the Western Front. The Bolsheviki are growing bolder, our lines are more extended, and we're a good many thousand miles from our base. Outside of that everything is fine! And we have to depend on Willie Brant to guard the center of our long line."

"The very worst place," I affirmed.

Our little force was extended from Vladivostok halfway across Siberia. One of the worst sections of all was the cen-

tral portion which was threatened on the north by huge numbers of sullen Bolsheviki coal miners and foresters.

Certainly Willie Brant was the wrong man for this tight place where a single mistake might result in cutting our line in two, leaving the American troops around Khabarovsk and Blagoveschensk cut off from their base.

My orders required me to go to Chita. I was given a sealed envelop with instructions not to open it until out of Vladivostok. Next morning I headed forth, boarding the crowded train and preempting a compartment for myself and orderly.

The station was jammed with patient, fatalistic Russians and their families.

My orderly and I worked for an hour cleaning out the débris left by the last occupants of the compartment, while officious Japanese soldiers—the train guards—held back the crowd who tried to swarm aboard far beyond the capacity of the train. Left to themselves, the travelers would have jammed the corridors, climbed on the roofs and occupied the washrooms and vestibules.

The train started at last with much blowing of whistles and ringing of bells.

The sealed envelop I carried interested me mightily, but I carefully refrained from opening it, waiting until the last houses in Vladivostok should be well behind us. But I was not destined to open it for some time to come. We had scarcely started and were not yet out of the station, when we were shunted to another track.

I soon discovered the cause when I saw masses of American infantry waiting with stacked arms to go aboard their trains.

It was Willie Brant's regiment, which had started to entrain at four o'clock that morning and was not yet aboard, although it was nearly noon.

Since our train seemed rooted to the tracks, I strolled out to watch the entraining of Willie's regiment. It was as I might have expected. Wagons, mules, soldiers and officers were jammed together. Part of the supply train was mixed with part of the headquarters company; soldiers were crowded into open flat cars, while machine gun and ration carts were shoved into box cars. Teamsters milled around with their animals, shoving them aboard wherever opportunity offered. Men strolled about aimlessly and found space wherever they could, irrespective of their organizations.

Colonel Willie Brant was fussing about importantly with a sheaf of papers in his hand, trying to run the whole show himself while his officers stood about in bored idleness. Several years previously I had seen Villa's bandit force entrain at Juarez with half the fuss and confusion.

AS I stood there watching the scene I saw a familiar figure come out of the station, accompanied by three or four Russian officers. My eye followed the trim figure in scarlet and gold. It was Brodsky, the Russian cavalry general whom I'd seen at the café.

Accompanied by his aides, he stopped for a moment to study the scene curiously; then, shaking his head, he went on. There was something commanding and arresting about his tall, well built figure. Here, one would say instinctively, is a man accustomed to power. But I was ashamed that any foreign officer should see and criticize any such unmilitary spectacle as that afforded by Willie Brant's regiment entraining.

The scarlet-clad Brodsky and his officers strode up the track to a light engine with two cars. This they boarded, switched back and forth once or twice until they were on the main line, when the small train pulled out and left the yards.

I envied the business-like fashion in which he had avoided the confusion and disorder attendant upon the entraining of the American regiment. I wished that I had applied to accompany him. This wish grew stronger as hour after hour passed. It was an hour or two

later before the last echelon of the troop train pulled out, the men shouting and yelling like a gang of hoodlums.

At last we started. I returned to my compartment, only to find it already occupied by two passengers, a man and a woman.

The man was a pale faced, stoutly built type of Russian of the better class, exceedingly oily and polite. The girl was beautiful in a hard sort of way. They had no right to be in a compartment reserved for an Allied officer; but they begged so earnestly to be allowed to stay that I relented. The trains at that time were primarily used for troop moves; and civilian travel was a secondary affair.

Scarcely had I seated myself when a Japanese officer and two soldiers appeared at the door, examining papers and tickets. The stocky, bespectacled little officer, in his ill-fitting uniform and clumsy, oversized, brown riding boots, was about half the size of the huge Russian. But at his side was a Samurai blade and at his belt was a pistol; behind him stood two bayoneted guards, and behind the three yellow men stood a powerful and fully organized empire.

My own uniform drew a respectful salute and the polite Japanese hissing of indrawn breath, but the travel and identity papers of the two Russians were examined very narrowly and returned somewhat haughtily. Again the Japanese bowed to me and hissed politely as he backed out the door. I put down my traveling companion as a rather prosperous business man—possibly one of the breed who profit at the time of war and revolution—and his companion as a light of love. They addressed me in French and spoke fluently in that language.

The train was now well out of Vladivostok, and it was time for me to unseal my letter. This I did, waiting until my traveling companions were engrossed in conversation.

The instructions were brief and explicit, their import such that I bent over them in frowning concentration.

> 1. You will proceed immediately to Chita and find out from Ataman Semionoff's headquarters the status of Brodsky, reputed to be a former Russian cavalry general. You will determine particularly what forces Brodsky has under his control, where they are located and what his relations are to the other Cossack leaders. See Brodsky personally.
>
> 2. Find out about the new Bolshevist leader, reported recently arrived from Moscow to take command of the Interior Partisans. The information to date is that his name is Kagoi, that he is a former Imperialist army officer and that he carries full powers from Moscow to organize the Siberian ranks. Verify this information and report at the earliest possible moment.

This was interesting news, though rather startling. So far the Bolshevists in Siberia had been fighting in scattered detachments, seemingly independent of each other and under no central control. If Moscow was organizing and uniting them, it would spell trouble for us. The Interior Partisans was the name of the Bolshevist bands which roved and pillaged outside of Vladivostok as far as the Amur River, including the coal miners who were causing us so much trouble.

RAISING my head from the thoughtful study of these instructions, I found the eyes of both of my traveling companions fixed intently upon me. Their quickly averted glances and assumption of indifference were almost too sudden to be assuring. As I folded the paper into the inner pocket of my blouse, I wondered if I had been altogether wise in allowing these two strangers to share my compartment.

But they were so amiable and so obviously friendly and naive, that I attributed their interest in my affairs to travelers' curiosity and let it go at that.

It was usually my custom, when traveling, to deny all knowledge of the Russian language; principally because it saved me from listening to a lot of idle chatter, and also because it gave me an opportunity to overhear bits of informa-

tion and news that I ordinarily would not have heard.

Like many educated Russians, they talked a lot in abstractions and entered into long, purposeless, philosophic discussions. Their voices flowed on and on, and it was not until I felt rather than heard a change in their tones that I paid any attention to their conversation.

"He will undoubtedly meet us at the next station," said the girl.

"Take care! The American officer may overhear you." The man's voice contained a warning note.

"Oh, that stupid rabbit! He doesn't understand a word of Russian," she retorted with a toss of her head.

I stared straight to the front, my face as blank as I could make it.

"One can not be too careful," said the man.

"Oh, him!" There was a world of contempt in her tone. "With my own hands I've killed twenty better than him," she stated.

The unflattering nature of her remarks and their effect on my injured feelings were forgotten in a second as I grasped the purport of her statement.

Knowing what I knew of conditions in revolutionary Russia, I accepted quite calmly the girl's statement that she was a man-killer. It meant only one thing. I had read and heard of these Russian Bolshevik women, who killed for the sheer love of killing and insisted upon executing prisoners with their own hands.

Stealing a side glance at her profile, I found it easy to believe that she would be capable of such conduct. There was something tigerish about her features and something feline about the sharp white teeth. There were faintly cruel lines about her eyes and mouth; and it was not at all hard to picture her shooting down prisoners in cold blood and enjoying the experience.

Her previous statement had convinced me that she was a Bolshevist, but her next words were even more startling. I had serious difficulty in maintaining my indifferent pose when I heard them. They dropped as carelessly from her lips as if she were speaking of the weather, and she was entirely calm about it.

"The first chance you get," she said casually, "knock that dumb rabbit in the head and we'll take that document away from him. I think it has something to do with us."

CHAPTER VII

WILLIE BRANT'S REGIMENT

THE train compartment was one of those roomy affairs typical of the wide gage Trans-Siberian. Two long wooden seats extended down each side—seats which became berths at night—while above were two hinged shelves that also could be used as berths when let down.

I sat nearest the window, with the two Russians in the opposite seat between me and the door. The worst of it was that I had removed my belt with its heavy automatic and extra magazines and had hung it with my field glasses near the door where my bedding roll and musette bag were stacked.

Certainly I had let myself in for a pretty mess through my well meant kindness. My orderly was in another compartment and would not come near me until it was time to make up my bed late at night. After that first inspection by the Japanese guards I knew there would be no more, for under their system the Japanese in charge of a train let the commander of each station be responsible for people getting on and off the train.

All I could do was sit tight and keep on the alert. I had no doubt that the man was armed and that the girl as well carried a small revolver in her bag. I could feel the eyes of the Russian studying me as if to determine just how much of a fight I could put up. The girl's keen glance had already noted that my pistol hung out of reach.

"That great cannon he carries will

be of no use to him," she said indifferently. "We will take it with us once you have finished with him."

Her words rang in my consciousness. It was a queer experience to sit there and have one's early demise discussed as calmly as two butchers might consider the slaughtering of an ox. But it would be fatal to show by any sign that I understood what was going on; so I sat and stared ahead as if engrossed by my thoughts. I strove to maintain a serene exterior. In these isolated compartments almost anything could happen, for no sound penetrated either to the corridor or to the neighboring compartments except the noise of the train.

It seemed to me that the best plan was to wait until they made some move and then leap upon the man, endeavoring to knock him out before the woman got into action. It was the woman who worried me the most, for Russian women were said to fight like tigers and to have no scruples about shooting a man in the back.

To my relief I felt the train slowing up preparatory to stopping at one of the many small stations along the route. There would be Japanese guards at this station, and I planned to notify them of the character of my traveling companions. Unfortunately, however, the Russian railway carriage windows were no different from their counterparts in other countries. In an effort to air out the compartment I had already tried unsuccessfully to open the window and found it locked as securely into place as if welded to the steel of its sash.

The train came to a stop at last. Glancing out of the window, I casually simulated a look of sudden interest, as if recognizing some one on the platform. I rose in my place as if going out. I saw the girl give the man a warning glance as he shifted his position. What the look portended I could not tell; but I bowed politely and excused myself, in French, as I started to pass them.

There is something about the French language that induces politeness; and there is something about the suddenly uttered words of a foreign language which attracts the listeners' attention. Before they realized it, they had answered my polite apology and instinctively bowed in return. The second or two that was thus consumed gave me time to get past them, although I watched carefully for an attempt to trip me up.

The man's hand went to his hip pocket and the girl's hand strayed to the half open bag at her side, but I was already at the door and had removed my pistol belt from its hook with one hand while I opened the door of the compartment with the other. The train was now standing still. The compartment door was open, and the rest of the car would have been instantly alarmed had there been any sort of outcry or had a shot been fired.

Stepping through the doorway into the corridor, I deliberated upon the next step.

For me to attempt to arrest them myself might result in certain complications because of the duties upon which I was then engaged. And furthermore, I had no authority to arrest them, seeing that the Japanese had retained all police powers in Siberia. Also, it was possible for them to deny any intention of evil, and it would look ridiculous for me to hold them up at pistol point on mere suspicion. The better course, I reasoned, was to turn them over to the Japanese, who could hold them for strict investigation. So I went down the corridor toward the vestibule, seeking a Japanese officer.

SCARCELY had I set foot outside the car door when I heard the tramp of marching feet, and a squad of Japanese soldiers came to a halt on the platform below. Beckoning to their officer, I spoke to him in English, but met blank incomprehension. I tried again, this time in French, but failed to obtain better results. At last I tried him in Rus-

sian and found a glimmer of response, although his knowledge of the Russian tongue was exceedingly sketchy. By dint of words and signs I at last prevailed upon him to follow me; but too much time had been wasted in the effort. We went halfway down the corridor to the open door of my compartment.

It only took one glance inside to assure me that the birds had flown. It was necessary to go through the whole sign manual again, this time with a more difficult problem to convey. The Japanese officer shook his head and smiled, but it was quite apparent that he hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about. I finally gave it up, discouraged, and followed him out as he returned to the platform, attempting to catch sight of my recent traveling companions. They had disappeared as if an earthquake had swallowed them up.

Returning to the compartment, I noticed for the first time that their two small bags had disappeared also. Evidently the woman's keen mind—or her intuition—had perceived that I had gone to seek their arrest. There was no sign of them in the other compartments or in the washroom; and how they had disappeared so quickly was a mystery that I could not solve.

Again I went to the vestibule and stepped on the platform to look over the crowd. As I stood there, another Japanese officer, his sword clanking, came swiftly across the platform with a telegraph slip in his hand. He was followed by several chunky Japanese soldiers, who leaped aboard the train on the car ahead and began to search each compartment. I heard the compartment doors slamming noisily as they advanced through my car and I was waiting outside my compartment when they arrived.

Much to my surprise he addressed me in English.

"You have nothing seen of a big Russian accompanied by a woman, have you?" he asked as he hissed politely.

"Yes, I have—" And I told him my experience as briefly as possible.

He heard me in silence, his impassive Oriental face expressing no emotion.

"It is too bad," he said as I finished. "They were very dangerous people. The woman is named Vera Kronotoff—a dangerous and vicious Bolshevist spy who has many crimes against her. The man is an emissary sent from Moscow to organize the Reds in Siberia. He is very dangerous also. He is named Kagoi."

The Japanese officer departed. The train started in a few moments. I resumed my seat in the compartment, mentally kicking myself for not having seized those two on suspicion when I had the opportunity. Kagoi was the very man noted in my letter of instructions; and I felt that I had certainly made a bad beginning of my mission. But nothing could be done about it now, and gloom settled over me like a blanket.

The train kept on its way through small towns and great ones, stopping for an hour or two at Nikolsk, halting for awhile at Ussuri, then on through Khabarovsk and Blagoveschensk, moving slowly but steadily toward Chita.

Before arriving at Chita, we came to a place called Verchinsk where we began to see traces of the recent fighting. Beyond Verchinsk the ground on both sides of the tracks was strewn with the bodies of slain Bolshevists.

Inquiry developed the fact that the Cossacks under Brodsky, the tall Cossack officer whom I had seen in Vladivostok, had wreaked terrible execution here. A Japanese officer who spoke French gave me further details of the battle that had taken place in this spot. He grew enthusiastic—for a Japanese—over the brilliant victory that had been gained by the Cossacks.

As far as I could gather from his description, a force of five thousand Bolsheviki had been held by the frontal attack of a few hundred Cossacks, while the main Cossack force of some fifteen hundred men had smashed in a terrific

flank attack, putting the Bolshevists to flight with immense slaughter. Brodsky's reputation as a battle leader certainly had not suffered by this fight.

Many of the towns along the Trans-Siberian were a long way from the railway station because, I was told, of the exactions of the railway builders, who demanded tribute from each town before they would run the line near it. Those towns which refused to pay found themselves several miles from the shining steel tracks. This always necessitated a long droshky ride from the train to the town.

DRIVING through the muddy streets of Chita, I at last located the American liaison officer. He helped me find quarters at the hotel—a mournful looking building that showed plainly the ravages of war and revolution. The officers of Semionoff's command swaggered about the streets, but the townspeople were sullen. Ugly stories had come down to us of Semionoff's treatment of the Siberian townspeople. The American liaison officer confirmed and amplified this, stating that the big Cossack chieftain was not only extorting money but that he was abducting and shooting people for any or no reason.

This had led to a serious reduction in Semionoff's command. It seemed that one of his sub-atamans, disgusted by the constant cruelty to the civilian population, had withdrawn, taking with him over a thousand Cossacks.

"Who was this sub-ataman?" I asked.

"A Russian officer—a former general of cavalry—named Brodsky," he answered.

"Where has he gone?"

"Back toward Vladivostok. You must have passed him on the way. He moved out in three big troop trains."

If I had passed him, I reasoned, it must have been while I slept; but if Brodsky was going back toward Vladivostok, then back I must go.

After verifying the details of the Russian general's departure, I boarded the first train and busied myself along the route inquiring for traces of Brodsky, finding that he had passed through Khabarovsk and was heading for some point between that city and Vladivostok.

This was important information; but I garnered even more important news along the route. The Bolshevist leader, Kagoi, had wasted no time and was already rousing the country and rallying the Bolshevists around him. From the American viewpoint the worst of it was that he was concentrating his forces along our weakest sector, opposite the point where Colonel Willie Brant's regiment was guarding the railway.

Not long after leaving the Amur River, I ran into Willie Brant's regiment, the first outfit I saw being at company headquarters which straggled near a small station and looked more like a Gypsy camp than military quarters. Unshaven soldiers lounged around near the station. A fracas began at the far end of the car, and I discovered that three drunken soldiers, with a bottle of vodka, were trying to force the guard to let them board the train. There was no sign of any American officer about, and I chased the soldiers back to their camp.

Thenceforward I saw nothing but American soldiers camped along the tracks. They were spread out in a thin line in small detachments of a squad or less, and officers were as rare as hen's teeth. It was only when I came to a small town, halfway to Vladivostok, that I sighted regimental headquarters which differed only slightly from the other camps in having a few more officers about and having the regimental colors, the national flag and the blue regimental flag, with the golden eagles perched on their staffs, displayed prominently in front of a log hut. There were very few soldiers here—orderlies, messengers and headquarters men—scarcely half a company all told.

Suddenly I remembered that river crossing at the Plattsburg maneuvers, when Captain Willie Brant had tried to

hold his position with a long, thin line of men. As a colonel here in Siberia he was repeating the same mistake, in attempting to hold a long line of important railway with an entire regiment spread thinly along its length, without any reserve to hurry to a threatened point.

It would be no trick at all for an alert Bolshevist commander to cut the line in several places and inflict heavy losses upon the American forces while doing so.

The worst of it was that the Bolshevist forces were concentrating in this territory under Kagoi. They might descend upon Brant at any time, and I hated to think what would happen when they did.

CHAPTER VIII

COSSACKS

I DESCENDED with my bedding roll, musette bag and my orderly at Willie Brant's headquarters. The colonel was billeted in a log *izba* of typical Siberian construction, with ornately carved rafters. Willie Brant himself was asleep when I came in; but his regimental adjutant, a bored and weary young captain, courteously put himself at my service to give all the information that I required. The first question I asked him concerned the whereabouts of the Bolshevist concentration and where Kagoi was to be found.

"Major, I tell you frankly, I've been so busy with the reports and the paper work required by Colonel Brant that I haven't found time to learn the situation around here. I don't know where the Bolshevists are, or where Kagoi is."

Then I asked him if he knew where the Cossack force, recently come from Chita, was located. To this he gave the same answer; and soon I saw that I was wasting time trying to get any information from headquarters. He was very prompt in procuring two good horses for me and my orderly; so I left headquarters to pack my saddlebags and prepare for a trip in search of information.

While my orderly was getting the horses ready I strolled into a sort of restaurant at the end of the village. The place was thick with flies and none too clean, but was well patronized by the local Siberians. It took me about five minutes to learn that Brodsky's Cossack force was concentrated near an abandoned mining camp four or five versts away. It was a great deal more difficult to secure any information concerning Kagoi and his Bolshevist outfit; for here every man was afraid of his neighbor, not knowing who among them might be a Bolshevist spy. As nearly as I could gather, Kagoi was up near the coal mines about fifteen versts distant, where he was using the coal miners as the nucleus of his force. Among the peasants in that restaurant was one slimly built, intelligent looking young man, who took no part in the conversation, but listened quietly.

As I left he followed me out of the log hut and signaled.

"If you are desirous of going to Ataman Brodsky's camp, I will be very glad to escort you there," he said quietly.

"Who are you?" I asked.

He drew himself up.

"I am Nicholas Nicholaevich Mornoff, Essaoul of Cossacks, Commander of the Fifth Sotnia of Ataman Brodsky's force. At your service, sir." He saluted very smartly.

I bowed and returned his salute.

"Thanks very much," I said. "I shall be glad indeed to avail myself of your aid."

He quickly showed me which road to take out of town and promised to meet me half a verst or so along the road. He explained that this precaution was necessary, as he was sent to report on conditions along the railway and did not wish to be recognized as a Cossack officer by the villagers.

The horses were waiting before headquarters. After examining bits, girths and stirrup straps, I mounted and we rode out, my orderly and myself, down

the road which the Cossack officer had designated.

It was late in the afternoon as we followed the dirt track, passing on the way several barefoot peasant women carrying burdens on their heads. We broke into a trot after awhile and soon covered the half verst to the place where we were to meet our guide at the edge of a small thicket of fir trees.

There was no sign of him until we reined in parallel with the trees, when he rode out in front of us, dressed now in the flowing coat and gray fur *khubanka* of a Cossack officer with the gold insignia of a captain on his epaulets. He looked very smart in the high seated Cossack saddle; but I had little time to notice him, for six Cossack soldiers filed out from the trees behind him, carrying their lances low to avoid the branches. They trotted briskly out and formed in front of me, straightening out in line and dipping their lances in salute.

"It is better that we have an escort," said the young essaoul simply. "There are many bad men about, both Reds and Greens."

"Do the Greens give you much trouble?" I asked as the young officer rode up beside me and the Cossacks fell in at the rear.

"Much trouble," he answered, "for they are like the Bolshevists; one day they are tramps or working men out of employment, and the next day they are armed, robbing and slaying."

We entered a forest road, and the young officer sent two of his men ahead as an advance guard. They rode very easily as they galloped past us; and almost unconsciously I noted that their saddlery and equipment were unusually clean compared with the Cossack equipment I had seen.

Besides lances, they carried curved sabers and carbines. They were plentifully supplied with ammunition, each man having an extra bandoleer in addition to his belt load. I complimented the young captain on the appearance of his men, and he accepted my remarks gravely.

"Yes," he answered, "our ataman keeps us very strictly drilled and disciplined. He is a great man, our ataman. Most of the officers and many of the men have served with him on the Eastern Front, where he led us very skilfully against Germans, Austrians and Hungarians. He is a born leader, our ataman. He has never yet suffered defeat."

"Why did he leave the Ataman Semionoff?" I asked.

"Because of Semionoff's cruelty and his rapacity," returned the captain. "Our ataman will not execute prisoners. He is very strict about women and looting. The penalty is death for any one of us who mistreats a civilian, a prisoner or a woman."

It was hard not to admire a Russian officer who maintained so humane an attitude; for in these troublous times Red and White seemed bent on inflicting the most savage punishment upon each other and upon the natives. I asked him many other questions. Some he answered. Some he met with discreet silence. My respect for him grew to sizable proportions as we rode along that silent forest road. The little Cossack ponies pattered along behind us.

WE RODE steadily for what I judged to be well over an hour before we were challenged by an outpost of Cossacks concealed at the side of the road. They passed us, their noncommissioned officer saluting as we went by. Another two or three hundred yards farther, and we were again challenged, this time by a larger force which seemed to be about the strength of one of our cavalry platoons.

Across an open field I saw another body of equal strength in a small camp and beyond that the smoke arose from a third. No special knowledge was needed to perceive that we had passed the line of outposts and were now going

through the line of supports. The Cossack chief certainly knew his business, judging from the disposition of his security force alone.

Another few minutes' trotting brought us to the outskirts of a large village of log *izbas,* which fairly hummed with activity. An alert sentinel, walking his post back and forth across the road, shouted a challenge. Upon the response from the captain at my side, he called loudly toward a guardhouse behind him. From it there clattered forth a guard of some fifteen dismounted Cossacks, who formed up very quickly with rifles at the carry and presented arms as their officer saluted us.

It struck me that I might be coming into a well disciplined American camp, so alert and business-like were these men and so smart were they in rendering military honors. Along the road from the right came another column of led horses, evidently being brought from water. The noncommissioned officer at their head shouted out the Russian command for attention; then, turning toward me, saluted as he recited in a loud voice the Russian formula of respect to a higher officer.

At the flank of the village I could see long picket lines filled with horses, forage stacked in neat piles and transport wagons parked hub to hub with harness carefully covered in workman-like fashion. Here indeed was a well ordered command, its discipline and training evidenced by a thousand small details.

We rode up to a large *izba.* On its porch stood a group of Cossack officers, who clicked their heels and stood at salute as I dismounted. I saluted and bowed, waiting for each to introduce himself as is the custom. My guide, the young captain, waited until these formalities had been concluded, then led me into the interior of the *izba,* where two or three officers were waiting with reports and papers. A door at the far end of the room evidently gave on to the private office of the ataman.

This door opened and a tall, thin Russian officer with exceedingly aristocratic features hurriedly strode forth, his saber swinging at his side. He introduced himself in excellent English as Colonel Philipoff.

Taking my arm, he led me into a small room, dim in the late dusk of evening. Candles had not yet been lighted. A tall figure rose from behind a desk as I entered and bowed gravely. In the dim light I discerned the tall, capable figure and the scarlet and gold uniform of Ataman Brodsky.

"The ataman does not speak English," said Colonel Philipoff, "but he has asked me to express to you his thanks for the courtesy of your visit, and invites you to remain as his guest for as long as you wish to stay."

"Please express my thanks to the ataman for the courtesy of his escort that he so kindly sent with me, and for the invitation of which I shall gladly avail myself for a day. Please express to the ataman also my compliments on the discipline and appearance of his command—"

Here the ataman interrupted and said something to Colonel Philipoff, who turned to me.

"The ataman will be pleased to parade it in your honor in twenty minutes and requests that you observe the quickness with which it turns out."

This would be exceedingly interesting, I thought; but I had some other things on my mind.

"Tell the ataman that I have come here to inquire about his attitude toward the Americans and confer with him on possible joint action against the Bolshevist forces of Kagoi."

This was translated; but before the reply came an officer entered in a hurry and said something in a low voice to Colonel Philipoff, who immediately turned to the ataman and conferred with him in a whisper.

"We have received important news," said Colonel Philipoff to me, "and you will see the command turned out sooner than you expected."

CHAPTER IX

A QUESTION IS ANSWERED

THE interview was evidently over for the present. I bowed to the ataman and was led out by Colonel Philipoff, whose manner betrayed a faint trace of excitement. He called out a sharp order as we entered the larger room of the *izba* and strode with me through the doorway on to the porch.

As we reached the outside, the high, shrill, warning notes of a bugle broke out and the camp suddenly swarmed with silent, swift activity. Soldiers with sabers and carbines poured from the long log barracks. They ran to the picket line. For a few seconds saddles flashed up and on to the horses' backs. Bridles were put in place and horses led out.

In almost the time it takes to tell it, men were forming in double ranks. There was a sharp rattling of voices as they numbered off. Officers' horses appeared as if by magic, were mounted and streamed in all directions as the *sotnia* commanders hurried to their posts. The scene would have been bewildering to any but a trained military man; for in less than five minutes some nine *sotnias* of a hundred men each stood rigid in locked ranks, with a forest of lances standing above them.

Sotnias were quickly formed into *escadrons*, and the three *escadrons* swung into line, forming the regiment.

I stepped aside as I heard the tramp of feet behind me. Two officers, sabers drawn, took their place at attention on either side of the door. Out between them marched another officer, carrying the *bunchuk*, a mace-like symbol of ebony and silver, which takes the place of a flag in some Cossack regiments. The three strode to their horses and mounted, trotting toward the waiting regiment. Behind them, appearing from around the corner of the house, rode the tall scarlet-and-gold clad ataman, accompanied by several staff officers. As the *bunchuk* and the ataman appeared before the regiment, the forest of lances dipped in one motion, their pennons whistling through the air. A crackling, barking roar broke forth on the right of the line and traveled down its length, as the Cossacks shouted their traditional greeting to their chief which, translated, means approximately, "Long life and health to your high born Excellency." As it died down the end of the line, I saw the ataman draw up his horse and shout a reply.

"Health to you, Cossacks," came his response, loud and clear.

Colonel Philipoff rode up to the porch and invited me to mount.

"If you wish to see the Cossacks in battle, now is your chance," he said grimly.

"That sounds interesting to me," I replied, as I swung into the saddle. "But who are you going to fight and why?" I asked as I straightened out my reins.

"The answer to that is also the answer to the question you asked of the ataman," he replied as we trotted toward the regiment.

The *sotnias* were now wheeling into column, compact clumps of lances turning on a pivot like bits of well oiled machinery. Somewhere at the head of them was the ataman with his staff of officers. A bugle rang out, and the clumps of lances extended still more into columns of threes.

They certainly were well drilled, those Cossacks under Ataman Brodsky's command—and not in a stiff, mechanical, lifeless way, but as if welded into a unified whole. No professional officer could fail to see that there ran through their ranks the little ripple and snap that is like the feel of fine steel to the hand of the swordsman.

"The answer to my question?" I asked, puzzled.

"I'll tell you later when my information is verified," he returned as we galloped along the column, moving out sedately on the road by which I had

arrived.

Back in the rear I saw the transport carts wheel into column. I then realized that this sudden call to arms was even more serious than I had thought, for the command was taking to the field fully equipped. Near the head of the column, I saw that the outposts had been concentrated and were now moving ahead as the advance guard, while one detachment waited on the side of the road to take up its position at the end of the column as rear guard.

It was beautiful to see an organization move with such speed and smoothness; and I thought of the woeful spectacle of Colonel Willie Brant's regiment entraining at Vladivostok. The contrast was not very flattering to my pride as an American officer.

WHERE we were going or why, I did not know; but I was thoroughly enthusiastic at being again with mounted troops and feeling the surge and heave of a great column moving beside me. It wound like a snake along the narrow road and was soon swallowed up in the gloom of the forest. Little sound came from it—not a whisper was raised—and all one could hear was the steady tempo of horses' hoofs in the dust, the creak of saddle leather and the occasional clink of saber or spur. I noticed that the saddles were packed in heavy marching order, undoubtedly with extra rations and forage, and reasoned that the ataman had stripped his camp bare in that short time between the blowing of the bugle and the departure of the column.

I myself had achieved almost equal speed in a small unit, but never had I seen a unit so large as a regiment taking the field in heavy marching order in such short time.

The sun was setting, and the woods grew quite dark until a faint silvery radiance heralded the appearance of the rising full moon. The column wound its silent way through the forest at a walk until a low voiced order rippled back from ahead and, as one unit, every horse in the regiment increased its gait to the trot. There was not a faltering step or a single evidence of see-sawing back and forth between units, and the gait seemed to be of the same steady beat throughout the length of the mile-long column.

Ahead of me now was the ataman and a clump of horsemen who rode with him, while behind me rode an officer whom I judged to be the chief of the first squadron. Far off to the right and left I caught glimpses down occasional forest glades of pennoned lances borne by the dark figures of the horsemen guarding our flanks.

We emerged from the forest at last, while at the same moment the scouts on our flanks broke out to right and left and cantered across the open fields which bordered the road. I knew without seeing that we were moving forward like a huge spearhead, the point of it being a clump of Cossacks far out on the road ahead. Another command went past me and rippled down the column, being caught up by low voices here and there and relayed.

Suddenly the regiment slowed to a walk. Another word was spoken, and the regiment halted in place. Without command the column opened out to the right and left, and every saddle was emptied. Wondering how this order had been transmitted, I reasoned that the Cossacks must have followed the example of their chief, who, like any good cavalryman, took advantage of every opportunity to ease the burden of his mount. Even dismounted, there was little sound from the column, except an occasional grunt from a horse as girths were tightened.

The ataman seemed to be waiting for something. I saw him standing at the junction of two crossroads and heard far in the distance the muffled beat of horses' hoofs at the gallop. Five minutes passed and then ten, while the moon rose higher and clearer, making the

scene nearly as bright as day. There was no sound throughout the countryside except the occasional sad cry of a night bird or the wind in the pine trees of the forest.

A Cossack messenger evolved from a dark blur on the road into a four-legged object that came nearer and nearer, until man and horse could be distinguished in every detail. The Cossack drew rein and leaped from his mount before the ataman. Saluting, he gave some report. Whatever it was, it caused an immediate stir in the little group of men about the ataman. They hurried to their horses. Colonel Philipoff rode back to where I stood.

"The answer to your question can be told at last," he said. "Kagoi has attacked the American regiment in two places. He has sent in a strong body of horsemen and captured the American colonel and all his headquarters. The ataman rides to the aid of the Americans!"

CHAPTER X

THE HAMMER AND THE ANVIL

SOMEHOW the news that the Americans needed to be rescued did not stun me as I might have expected, for I had feared this very thing ever since I had known that Willie Brant was to guard that section of railway. History had repeated itself; the incapable colonel had again extended his line too far, had again failed to hold out a reserve and was captured in real war just as he had been captured on maneuvers.

The case was almost entirely similar, for his horses had been captured as well. I had seen them there near his headquarters, and now his regiment was without any means of lateral communication.

In the second that followed Colonel Philipoff's words I heard from afar a faint *tap-tap-tack-tack* and knew even at that distance that it was the rapid tattoo of rifle fire.

The column was electrified into sudden life. Men leaped into their saddles, and the regiment flowed forward toward the sound of the guns—the most inspiring sound to which any soldier can march.

As we came out into more open country, two orderlies galloped past me, and I wondered what their speed portended. I was soon to know, for a deeper note fell on my ears, coming from behind. Out of the dim moonlight came one squadron to the right at a gallop. As it came abreast of the leading squadron it settled smoothly into the trot again. In another minute or two the sound was repeated—a distant rustling, swelling into a crescendo of thudding hoofs—and the third squadron surged up on the left and relaxed into a trot. The ataman, approaching combat, had shortened and thickened his column and was going into action with his regiment close up under his hand.

The *tap-tap* of rifles far ahead had swelled into a deeper note as we neared the fighting. As yet we could see nothing on our front except an occasional clump of trees, a haystack or an isolated house, but I knew that we could not be more than two miles from the village. Just about this time the ataman swerved off the road and began to move across country. Far out on the front and flanks the scouts noted the change and swept around to conform to it. The giant spearhead traveled swiftly forward over the moonlit fields, while every moment the sound of firing grew louder.

Suddenly the column slowed to a walk and then halted, and I noticed that the ataman rode forward with his officers to the crest of a small knoll at the left. He tarried not a moment, but went on, and I galloped after him, convinced that the man was a good cavalry officer who wished to see for himself before bringing his powerful weapon into action.

Once over the knoll, I saw the lights of the village not a thousand yards ahead and issuing from it a dark, snake-like

object that flowed along the road. It was impossible at that distance and in that light to determine exactly what it was; but previous experience told me that it could be nothing but a column of men. Some orderlies galloped past me, returning to the regiment with the ataman's orders. They hurried out of sight behind the knoll. In a moment I heard the response as the column of horsemen pounded by, headed for the road leading from the village.

The ataman appeared again, galloping toward the head of that solid mass of horsemen, and I returned again to the column, wondering what he intended, but confident that, whatever it was, he knew his business. Black clouds were scudding across the face of the moon, throwing the plain into darkness; but the solid block of horsemen galloped steadily on, not swerving a hair's breadth from their route. The scouts had now drawn in more closely, some of them not over fifty feet from the column.

Then I noticed that the ataman had placed himself at the head of the right hand squadron. And, as I watched, the other two squadrons began to spread out in the darkness until I could feel rather than see that they were swinging in a great curve like a scythe. When the moonlight broke through the clouds again I saw that truly it was a mighty scythe the ataman was swinging in toward his enemies; for the two great squadrons had curved around and were descending on the roadway while the ataman's squadron pivoted at a trot.

The moonlight glinted on the sharp edges of that scythe, rippling its molten light along the lance points.

But the enemy had seen us at last, and a rattle of rifle fire broke out from the roadway. It was too late, for the curved end of that steel tipped scythe was cutting through the massed roadway as a farmer cuts through ripened grain. The firing died down and was succeeded by a hideous chorus of screams and yells as the Cossack line cut resistlessly through the masses of the enemy.

The squadron which the ataman headed had been moving forward slowly at a trot. A signal shrilled forth from a trumpet, and I saw the tip of the scythe suddenly draw off and reform behind its neighboring squadron. The ataman galloped toward it, while the squadron on the right, which had been moving forward at a trot, suddenly launched itself like a steel thunderbolt at the enemy jammed up in the road.

There came to me then a sudden thought of the *tumens* of Subatai, the great Mongol chieftain who had maneuvered thousands of horsemen with the flick of a finger. He sped them forth in successive hammer blows at the foe, while he maintained a reserve under his hand—made up from the successive spent waves—a constantly renewing series of blows that would break any antagonist.

This particular combat was quickly over. That last terrific smash had broken up what remained of the enemy formation, and the Cossacks had spread out over the field, running down the fleeing enemy like wolves, their lances rising and dipping in the moonlight which no longer glittered from clean steel points.

I FOLLOWED the ataman ahead of the reorganized third squadron as he trotted sedately forward toward what had been the center of the Bolsheviki force. The firing still continued far to the right and left, and I knew that scattered detachments of Americans were putting up a plucky fight against the swarms of Bolsheviki that remained.

But the ataman wasted no time. A series of short, sharp blasts on a trumpet recalled every pursuing Cossock. *Sotnias* galloped into line and squadrons reformed as if by magic. One group of Cossacks brought forward a clump of dismounted men. As they came nearer I recognized the American uniforms and galloped up to them. In their midst,

surrounded by a handful of officers, was Colonel Willie Brant. Some thirty officers and men were with him.

I rode up in time to hear Willie Brant excitedly arguing with Colonel Philipoff.

"But, I tell you, I must get back to the command of my regiment." Willie Brant's high pitched, querulous voice was almost tearful.

"It is the ataman's order that you remain with me, Colonel," returned Philipoff firmly. As he beckoned, a horse was brought up for the excitable regimental commander who had lost his regiment.

It was high time that some one took command of that regiment, and from a spectator I was suddenly transformed into an active participant. The ataman's column was now formed and moving toward the village. Riding to Philipoff's side, I explained my plan briefly to him; and he galloped away to lay it before the ataman.

There was a quick response from the ataman. A *sotnia* of Cossacks trotted up with the captured horses of the Americans. In a few minutes I had most of them mounted. Philipoff came galloping back.

"The ataman says his scouts have brought word that only the center and right American battalions have been attacked. The one on the left is untouched."

"Tell your ataman that I will bring up that third American battalion, if he will drive the Bolsheviki toward me. Tell him I will be the anvil if he will be the hammer!"

I heard a deep, explosive, "Good!" come from behind Philipoff. Over his shoulder I saw the tall form of the ataman, scarcely remarking to myself that he had understood and had answered in English.

Organizing my group of officers and soldiers behind me, I set off at a gallop through the village, following the road that led to the third battalion stationed beside the railroad tracks. Some of the isolated American squads had gathered into platoons and were waiting uncertainly for orders. These I sent hurrying in toward their battalion headquarters.

I finally reached the small village where battalion headquarters were and found there a company which some young captain had had the sense to gather in. Other squads and platoons were hurrying to this point. It took at least three-quarters of an hour for the battalion to assemble two-thirds of its strength. Sending messengers to hurry the outlying detachments, I moved up the railway again toward the village.

It was slow work with these plodding infantrymen after the swift cavalry gallop, but I moved them forward in line of companies, ready to go into action at any moment if need be.

Far ahead of us on the other side of the village we heard the steady drum of rifle fire. From a distance came the shriek of a train whistle and the hum of rails which betokened the approach of a through train. The engineer slowed up at our wild waving and threatening motions, and I threw aboard a captain and a platoon of soldiers, instructing them to back the train up and bring forward the rearmost units. It required all of twenty minutes to accomplish this, and another thirty minutes passed before the train returned. We were almost back in the village when the engineer slowed down and I ordered the entire battalion aboard, politely but firmly ejecting every civilian from the crowded cars. Moving slowly along the track, we passed through the village and began to pick up isolated platoons and companies until the growing roar of fire warned me that we were approaching the Bolsheviki main body.

The major commanding the second battalion now took command of the regiment, but fell in instantly with the scheme of operations. We moved along a little farther before the train was finally halted. The infantry piled out and formed up into companies and battalions. As quickly as one unit was formed, it was moved out at right angles to the

railroad track until soon the entire command was ready and waiting.

"We'll give them a bellyful of lead," said the major.

"But don't shoot the Cossacks," I cautioned.

"We can follow up with the bayonet when they get close."

The line of infantry advanced in waves. Suddenly the roar of Springfield rifles announced that the enemy was being driven on to the anvil.

CHAPTER XI

HONORS OF WAR

THE firing ceased almost as soon as it began. Whistles blew madly up and down the line and, riding forward, I quickly determined the cause. The infantry occupied some rising ground, and from this vantage point I could see for several miles in the clear moonlight. Advancing in our direction along the railroad track was a horde of men, the nearest ones not over five hundred yards away. They were firing stubbornly as they came but, directly behind them like a line of beaters in a hunt, there swept a great wave of horsemen, the Cossacks of Ataman Brodsky. So near were they that fire from our rifles would undoubtedly score hits among them, and we were forced to remain silent.

But the infantry major had no intention of remaining inactive. An order traveled along the line, and I heard the tinkle and clash of bayonets being fixed and saw an angry wall of American soldiers rise up and push forward.

At the first volley the Bolsheviki had begun to stream across our front, seeking to get out of those two lines of steel, which were closing in upon them like the jaws of a trap. Their masses shifted away from the railway—an opening which was quickly filled as a squadron of Cossacks surged forward almost to our line before they wheeled to the left and bore down on the hapless Reds who ran before them. The steel jaws contracted closer and closer until the Bolsheviki began to surge out at the open end. Here they formed a sort of rallying point.

A black clad group of mounted men appeared from somewhere and created a temporary diversion by charging at the nearest Cossack squadron. The mounted Reds galloped at their enemies like a mob, with no order or formation.

It was then that the marvelous workings of the Cossack *lava* were most evident, for the squadron simply disintegrated before their advance only to reappear, attacking like hornets, on the flanks of the galloping Reds. Another squadron swung sharply into line and thundered at them, lances low. Fascinated, I watched the approach of this second squadron. Nearer and nearer they drew. I held my breath waiting for the second of the impact. It came in the flash of a second, broke and scattered the Red horsemen until groups of them were galloping aimlessly about the field, seeking some means of escape. The first squadron had reformed again and drove back through, completing the disintegration of the various groups. In the meantime the infantry line had swung about and bayonets were rising and falling in the ranks of the fleeing Reds.

Groups of soldiers began to come back, escorting prisoners who were massed near the railway.

The Cossacks again formed and drove after the survivors, hunting them down singly and in groups until the plain was emptied of all save wounded and dead Bolsheviki.

About this time the remaining American battalion approached, marching down the tracks, and I suggested to the major that we return to the village.

He was an energetic officer, that major, and quickly organized his command. Pressing the train into service again, he sent detachments from each unit up and down the line to collect the tents and bedding from the various camps. He

was slowly achieving order out of chaos, when the Cossacks came trotting into the place.

They wasted no time, but quickly formed ranks at the edge of the village, dismounted and immediately began to make camp. In a few minutes their camp-fires were lighted, and the plain outside the village twinkled with innumerable red fires as the men began to cook their evening meal.

After seeing to the stabling of my horse, I returned to the building that had been used by Colonel Willie Brant. Many officers were coming and going from its door as the young major busied himself in reorganizing the badly scattered regiment. The town seethed with American soldiers, but there was not a single Cossack to be seen. They had evidently been given strict orders to stay in their camp. The train came in after awhile and discharged squads of men, laden with tents and equipment. The major had planned his camp, and the tents began to go up one by one.

I kept wondering what had become of Colonel Willie Brant, as it was about time for him to appear on the scene and throw everything into confusion once more.

It may have been my imagination, but it seemed to me that I already detected a quieter, swifter activity among the soldiers of this regiment, as the young major calmly reorganized and reequipped them. But where was Willie Brant?

AS I stood about, watching the activities of the soldiers, I heard the stirring notes of a song carried downwind from the Cossack camp. The night resounded to the triumphant chant of "Shtenka Razin," the song about a Cossack hero of ancient days.

Attracted by the music and curious to see again the soldiers who had fought so well, I strolled toward the camp-fires of the Cossacks. At the edge of their camp I was stopped by the challenge of a sentry, who called a noncommissioned officer to inspect me.

After one look, the noncommissioned officer saluted and motioned for me to enter. They had no tents, these Cossacks, but each man had his saddle and saddle blanket. They spread them in neat rows where they would bivouac under the sky. They were gathered around their camp-fires now, singing at the top of their voices.

I pressed on to the far end of the camp where I saw three or four tents and a group of officers. Colonel Philipoff was among them and greeted me warmly.

"How do you like our ataman's answer to your request of this afternoon?" he asked smilingly.

"Splendid," I replied. "The finest kind of answer. It was a beautiful victory."

"But that is not all. Come with me," he invited, and led me around the tents to the rear where, guarded by six or eight Cossacks, sat several disconsolate looking prisoners.

I could scarcely repress a start of surprise as I saw seated among them the huge, pale faced Russian who had thrust his company upon me in the compartment of the train. Next to him, seated crosslegged on the ground, was the cruel, beautiful girl, his companion.

"We've captured Kagoi himself and the terrible Vera Kronotoff."

The girl looked up as I entered the circle of firelight and stared at me coldly.

"You do not remember me," I said. "I am the dumb rabbit whose head was *not* knocked in on the train."

This remark was in Russian, but she expressed no surprise.

"I knew you could speak Russian," she said. "I knew it the minute you rose from your seat."

"What are they going to do to you?" I asked, still in Russian.

"Oh, they won't waste much time on me," she replied. "I've drilled too many of their precious hides full of bullet holes. I'm not afraid of that; but I am afraid of this big ox playing the baby when the time comes."

She pointed a contemptuous finger at her companion. I took a closer look at him. Certainly, if the fear of death was ever written on a man's face, it was stamped ineradicably upon the pasty features of Kagoi, the Red emissary.

"Well, good luck," I said to her as I turned away with Philipoff.

"Tell me," I asked him, "what has become of the American colonel?"

"He is here," returned Philipoff. "I think he is now talking to our ataman."

WE WALKED around the end tent and proceeded to the front of the largest one in the center. Seated on a folding camp-chair was the tall, bearded ataman in his scarlet and gold. I strode up to him and put out my hand.

"Bobby," I said, "you're still the finest cavalryman I have ever served with."

"I thought you were wise to me," he replied, grasping my hand heartily. "Just when did you get next to the fact?"

"The minute I saw you lead that regiment out of camp," I replied. "But how the dickens did you attain your present exalted rank and all the tinware?" I pointed to the Saint George's Cross and the other decorations that glittered against the scarlet of his coat.

"Easy enough," he said. "I sort of blew up under Willie Brant—the poor little fish—and went barging over as a civilian to look at the War. In Paris I ran into a Russian friend of mine and told him I was out of a job. He was on the general staff of his army, and immediately hustled me over to Russia and got me a commission as lieutenant-colonel of cavalry. I went out, and things just naturally fell my way."

"But how the dickens did you learn to speak the language?" I asked.

"Don't you remember my telling you one time, Dick, that if you're going to study a language, don't study one that every one else knows—but tackle something like Russian, Chinese, or Japanese and rise above the common herd."

"I remembered that," I said, "and I took your advice and studied Russian."

"So did I, and have studied it for ten or fifteen years," returned Bobby.

"But why the dickens don't you come on back? You could get a commission again, now that the War is on."

"Dick," he said gravely, "I tell you frankly I can't consider it. When this show is over, which it will be soon, I have my choice of being a general in either the Lithuanian, the Esthonian or any number of other armies."

"Well, maybe you're right at that," I agreed thoughtfully. "But what have you done with Willie Brant?"

"Oh, poor old Willie—I nearly forgot him. He'll be here in a minute."

Then Bobby called an order in Russian. It was followed shortly by the appearance of Willie Brant himself—an older and rather pathetic looking Willie Brant, who marched in very briskly, nevertheless, and laid a paper on Bobby's knee.

"There it is," chirped the old man. "Now may I return to my regiment?"

"Certainly, Colonel. Goodby."

Much to my surprise the two shook hands in friendly fashion before little old Willie marched out into the darkness.

"What the devil is that?" I asked, pointing to the paper.

"Oh, that," returned Bobby easily. "That's just a little promise from Willie that he'll apply immediately for his thirty-year retirement. I just didn't want to see him mess up any more good American soldiers or any more officers' efficiency records."

"But however did you extract that promise from him?" I asked in amazement.

"Simple enough," grunted Bobby absently. "I threatened to call in the newspaper correspondents and tell them what a mess he'd made of things. Rather than face the barrage, he offered to put in for voluntary retirement."

"Thank God! But in spite of it," I said bitterly, "I suppose his kind will continue to claim the honors of war."

The Ivory Killers

By the Author of the "Lost End of Nowhere"

GORDON MacCREAGH

JAN RUYS was as bad a citizen as any at large in all of East Central Africa. He was not the worst, because there were also Mink McCarthy and Tino Corra.

But when men spoke of the nefarious three, they always mentioned Ruys first because of his bulk and belligerence, though these were deceptive. It was McCarthy who was the wicked one—small, sleek, sun tanned, neutral haired, khaki clothed—a creature of low visibility at all times. In effect, a mink; and equally hard, fast and ruthless. He had brains to offset Jan Ruys's overwhelming brawn.

Tino Corra had nothing especial to recommend him above such personalities as the other two. A small, dark, Latin type, he had his own reasons for keeping out of Portuguese Mozambique. But he was a good, hard working, tough egg, and he fitted in well with the combine—three as unsavory subjects as had ever come into the Uganda Protectorate to poach ivory.

It was this trio that the chief commissioner was discussing, as he sat in his office in Entebbe. He drummed his fingers on his desk and faced a tall, wide shouldered man who paced the room with silent restlessness. The tall one looked at him with hostility.

"And why are you telling me about your hard luck?" he asked defensively. "Tell some of your policemen, game wardens—somebody. That's why you collect a white hunter's license from me."

The commissioner continued evenly:

"The three would spot my men in a minute and would lay low, as good as white mice. Or they'd just lay up by some handy *donga* and neatly bushwhack them. Down in Rhodesia some witnesses just disappeared; but the police

could never get anything on those three. They're poison. And now I have them on my hands."

"Sound like nice boys," said the tall man. "I guess you'd better do something about them."

"I *am* doing something," said the commissioner. "I am negotiating with a man who knows the bush inside out, who's got the nerve of a devil and no nerves."

"Plenty of men like that on your force," said the tall man. "They've been after me for some damned silly regulation or other plenty o' times."

"I must have a man," said the commissioner, "who isn't tied down by what you call silly regulations, and who has the effrontery, if need be, to play a high handed game all on his own."

The tall man looked coldly at him.

"And I must have, essentially, a sportsman."

"Huh? I'll fall for that one," said the tall man. "Why must you have a sportsman?"

"Because," said the commissioner, "these men are using sub-machine guns and water hole poison. They poach ivory as a business."

"Hell!" The tall man growled. "That's swinish—beastly! Gosh, I'd like to—" He paused, then shook his head. "Well, I hope you get your man. I've got to be running along."

The commissioner smiled.

"Oh, I'll get him all right. I'll be seeing you tomorrow, my difficult Kingi Bwana."

"The hell you will!" said the tall man.

But the commissioner continued to smile and absently drummed a broken rhythm on the desk.

BUT despite popular indignation and the efforts of the police, the three swaggered from Entebbe a week later with a safari of lusty porters, empty handed. That is to say, most of them were without head loads. The hard bitten trio knew their Africa. They were no tenderfeet who needed luxuries. They traveled with the minimum of impedimenta. Mobility—the ability to cover country faster than anybody else—was more precious to them than comfort. Those strong, empty handed porters were designed to carry loads that would be collected later in the dense elephant jungles of Bugoma and Semliki forests.

And until they had such contraband loads, no authority could interfere with the safari. They came, therefore, unhindered into the Semliki country; and it was there that a native approached the camp one morning and talked with the safari headman. The headman came and reported—

"That fellow he say one white man not so far."

The trio sat up and began to take notice. A white man in that corner of the wilds might interfere with stealthy plans.

"He say he sit without safari; plenty load in *boma,* no porter mans, only two servant boy mans."

Mink McCarthy swore sibilantly. With quick fingers he softly opened the breech of his gun to assure himself of what he knew to be so; then he jerked his head at Tino Corra.

"Better go quietly and look him over. If it's any blasted official—" His pause was more ominous than words. Through taut lips he added, "This is new country—hardly shot over. And it's rich. Nothing's goin' to stop us here."

In the next moment he changed his mind with characteristic high-strung abruptness.

"Wait a minute. Let's all go."

They found the white man just as the native had described him. A tall, rangy, big shouldered man, dressed in shining, new and eminently correct big game hunter's clothing, sitting marooned in a *boma* piled full of all the camping gadgets that outfitters sell to fools. As soon as he opened his mouth they knew him for one of those rich American sports.

"Howdy, strangers. Say, but I'm right glad you happened along. You see me 'way up a tall tree."

The tenderfoot's story brought grins of wearied amusement to the faces of the experienced three. He had come out from Nairobi with the usual unwieldy safari under the guidance of a licensed white hunter. A week ago the hunter had contracted something virulently African and had died. The tenderfoot, confident in his ignorance, characteristically impatient over the delay, had picked up some sort of native guide and had forged ahead.

"—hustled the outfit along. Fired some pep into those hookworm coons and kept on going."

But the simple African, it transpired, objected to being pepped up.

"—kicked like steers at a paltry twenty-five miles a day."

And when the tenderfoot—who had made his pile in railroad contracting and had run some pretty durned lazy construction gangs in his day—proceeded to inject some efficient driving methods, the untutored African safari had quite simply vanished into the bush overnight, leaving the gang driver marooned with all his expensive gear, his burly gunboy and scrawny little cook, who had remained faithful to their quite exorbitant pay.

The trio grinned sourly at the idea of anybody trying to drive safari porters at twenty-five miles a day. And what was this rich sport proposing to do now?

"Well, gee, now—" the sport was dubious— "I've got my license right here to shoot four elephant and two rhino and a raft of other stuff, and I'm not licked bad enough yet to figure on going back empty.

"And, say now—" looking the others over with calculation— "you gentlemen look like you know your way around. How about if you could see your way to signing up with me and seeing me out of the hole? The check of Cyrus P. Carmody is good in Nairobi for anything reasonable you'd like to say."

The eyelids of Mink McCarthy flickered and he spoke quickly before the others could get in a word.

"Well, now, Mr. Carmody, we don't like to see any white man bushed this way; but, you see, we're really a prospecting outfit and your idea would break up our plans to smithereens. Let me and my mates here step aside and talk it over awhile."

The three walked off together. Immediately Jan Ruys, the hasty, blurted:

"Ah, what 'cher need to talk it over? Le's leave 'im sit. He's stuck safe. Carn't foller us—no porters nor nothin'; else we'd mebbe have to put 'im away quiet. Him an' 'is blarsted checks; just 's if we was workers for lousy wages."

Tino Corra saw the scorn growing in McCarthy's eyes and hastened to put himself on what he knew would be the winning side.

"But you are fooleesh, *amigo,*" he purred in his soft Latin voice. "Pairhaps he have monnaie cash, who is so reech. Wan license for wan elephant cost heem hundred pound. So then four license—ees eet not so? And he have gun, raifle, cartridge, everytheeng of best."

Mink's impatience with stupidity was savage. His lip quivered over his small, pointed eye-teeth.

"If either of you blighted fools had a half human head, I wouldn't have to worry about any game commissioner in all Africa. You look no further'n any other monkey can see with his silly eyes. Now, listen while I say it slow."

Slowly and impressively he proceeded to lay out the quick thought that had come to him.

"License for four elephant. Let that soak in awhile. Four tuskers to be shot all due and proper under the law. Does that mean anything to you? No, of course it don't. So I'll tell you. We sign on as guides. We take this silly blighter where *we* want to go. Four licenses—" the predatory teeth clicked in anticipation— "four little bits o' stamped paper can be stretched to cover up a hell of a lot of shooting if any

trouble comes sneakin' along in a uniform. And we ditch him when we come to the Belgian border with a full load. Why, the thing's a Christmas present."

Tino Corra's flashing smile came first, and the heavier one of Jan Ruys followed it more slowly.

"Meenk, he 's got the haid," Tino conceded.

And Ruys, though the full possibilities of the gift would have to be assimilated later, grunted agreement.

They went back to the rich sport, all smiles. They were poor men, and prospecting was a precarious game. They would throw over their plans and would sign on with the gentleman as regular white hunters. And to show their worth they would even contrive to find porters for the gentleman's baggage—or at all events for the valuable portion of it. And then the place for elephants, of course, was the great Semliki forest, not four days' trek distant.

TO THE three who had found Rhodesia too hot for comfort this was new country. But their safari headman was a Zanzibar Arab halfbreed whose father had been a doughty Rift Lakes slave raider in the good old days, and who himself, now that the profitable "black ivory" business was gone, had become a small scale poacher of the white. He knew his Budonga and his Semliki.

It was not long before the parched, flat, thorn scrub country began to give place to rolling grassland. Game was everywhere and foolishly tame. A splendid pair of rare roan antelopes, the hunter's prize, stood and looked at them from a little knoll, their magnificent horns curving back to their flanks. But the hurrying travelers were not interested in any such commercially valueless thing as sportsmen's prizes; and this rich sport did not even know the antelopes were rare.

He clamored buck-feverishly about all the minor items on his licenses. But Mink told him glibly:

"They'll be here when we come back. Elephants 'll be movin' up into the mountain valleys before the rains come. We'd never see a one. Now's the time for tusks."

The grass country began to give place to low hills covered with clumps of timber and patches of bamboo thicket—elephant country. The safari porters, instead of stringing out in front with all their noise and confusion, were ordered to the rear. The white men took the lead with the cunning old Zanzibar headman.

Extraordinary luck was with them. On the third day the American, ranging restlessly afar, fell into a hole that looked as if a small tub had been sunk there by some mysterious jungle gardener and as mysteriously removed. It seemed as if the gardener had been a lunatic and had sunk a whole row of tubs, removing them afterward.

Without a word among the three, Ruys gave Tino Corra a hoist up a not too leafy tree. Corra was down again in two minutes, nostrils twitching and eyes shining. He reported, whispering as if already within distance of great sensitive ears:

"Wan nice ravine that side look ver likelee. Wan sweet vallee, all euphorbia, an' bamboo, leetle bit left, look best place evair I see."

Mink was tersely efficient.

"All right, we'll take the ravine first. If they're not bottled there, we'll split and jockey 'em up and down the valley. Come ahead."

The three hired white hunters gave no thought to the disposition of their greenhorn employer who had spent his thousands to shoot an elephant. Though Mink, as an afterthought, told him curtly—almost ordered him:

"You stick with the safari and see no fool comes blunderin' an' crashin' behind us." And he threw over his shoulder as they departed, "We're just goin' scoutin' to see how they stand."

They disappeared up the ravine, the Zanzibari with them, treading like cats.

The greenhorn smiled thinly after them, nodding to himself. The smile went through the changing gradations from whimsicality to cold satisfaction. To his gunboy the greenhorn said in perfect Swahili—

"The safari stays here."

The gunboy replied simply:

"It is an order, bwana. They stay."

He threw his blanket from his enormous shoulders and soberly, unhurriedly, went to one of the packs from which he produced an immense spear blade—a long sword of a thing that fitted snugly to the end of the strong, beautifully polished stick that he carried. And with the putting together of that weapon, as if it were a symbol of domination, he was suddenly transformed into a formidable fighting man.

To the scrawny camp cook the greenhorn said—

"How do you read the signs, little wise one?"

The little man balanced on one leg and surveyed jungle and sky with the wisdom of a wizened ape.

"The wind blows from the valley over my left shoulder," he translated from the book of the jungle. "The vultures circle high against it. The toucans and the mik-mikki fly with it. What moves will be therefore in the valley."

"Good," said the greenhorn. "Come."

The two disappeared up the valley, treading like very wary cats.

ALMOST immediately they were in giant bamboo jungle, each knotted stem as thick as a man's leg, grouped in close clumps of twenty or thirty. Between the clumps lay open ground carpeted with the débris of long narrow leaves that had no crackle to them.

Good jungle, that. So softly could they proceed on that velvet pile that guinea fowl scratched contentedly all around them, and once two water-buck were surprised on the far side of a score of towering stiff stems. Safe jungle, because one could see anything that came; and a charging elephant, for instance, could easily be dodged among the palisaded stems.

That jungle gave place to junipers, witch-hazels, and giant yews of the Ruwenzori foothills, all interlaced with tangled scrub and vines—bad jungle, for any quick movement, or fast getaway from danger, was impossible. The greenhorn ducked and twisted through the tangle like a ghost, and the little black man followed like his shadow.

The rain forest again gave place to a wide amphitheater of bamboo grass. Not in giant clumps here; more like a close sown field of exaggerated corn, twenty feet high, stiff, sword edged—impossible jungle. Only a steam roller, or an elephant, could penetrate this barrier. And one of the two was in it. Soft cracklings, muffled snappings, moist crunchings issued from within. A giant, trampled tunnel bored into it.

A foolhardy hunter or an ignorant novice might have plunged on into this close walled tunnel. The greenhorn climbed up into the high flung roots of a huge fallen yew that the slowly spreading bamboo grass had killed. The little black man leaped up after him like a monkey.

From the lofty perch just on a level with the grass tops the jungle amphitheater looked like an undulating green lake; and, like a lake, the surface heaved and billowed with a heavy groundswell of monstrous motion beneath the surface.

Half an hour passed. The little black man touched his master's foot and pointed silently. Down the valley sides a cautious crackling was coming. Slowly it worked down to one edge of the amphitheater and stopped. It divided, and the careful crackling took different directions. One worked softly round in the direction of the fallen yew.

"Hmph! They know their business all right," the greenhorn muttered. "Ringing them round."

The nearest crackling came to a halt at the tunnel. A grunt of satisfaction

followed. Faint shufflings indicated a man composing himself to wait.

Silence enveloped the jungle amphitheater. Even the ponderous sounds from within stilled. Suspicious, tense, the whole jungle waited. Breathless, the still air was heavy with enormous happenings.

The faintest cautious click of a breaking twig sounded from the farther side. From within the matted cane came a quick scuffle and a great, windy *woosh* of expelled air.

The little black man raised his hands to the sides of his head, fingers fanned out, and then pointed an arm snakily from his nose. It was a silent picture of great ears flapping forward and a trunk breathing questingly for the least draft of wind.

There was no wind or sound. There was nothing—only wire edged waiting.

Into the tenseness a rifle spat viciously, thin and tenuous in the vast expectancy. Thunderous echoes rolled back from the wooded hills. And on that signal, as if it had been the first primal upheaval of worlds in the making, chaos exploded into the still jungle amphitheater—siren screamings, throaty trumpetings, more fast rifle shots, shouts, vast roarings, confusion, earthquake.

On the undulating sea of grass tops the watching greenhorn saw a tidal wave rise and go hurtling across the glade to the side farthest from the rifle fire, leaving a swath of destruction behind it. Merciless rifle shots met its approach, and then a hell of machine gun fire.

The greenhorn's face grew grim with disgust; but he said nothing. The little black man spat into the air before him.

The tidal wave broke into a wild tossing of grassy billows. Enormous lurchings heaved under the surface. Terror trumpeted. Human voices screamed hysterically. Bamboo stems crackled like fireworks. Ponderous impacts thudded together. The air quivered with immense forces in confusion.

The tumbled jungle surface began to disintegrate, to melt away beneath huge trampling feet. A twisted trunk licked up into the air. A great gray back heaved itself out of the destruction. Milling, struggling forms bulked huge in the confusion. Bursts of machine gun fire crackled above the uproar.

The greenhorn on his perch sat white and silent. The little black man made a single comment which expressed more than abuse.

"Females and young with the herd."

Then, with the queer unanimity of wild things in terror, the herd hurled itself into the tossing greenery again. The tidal wave formed and went whirling and crashing off in another direction.

"Poor silly brutes. They follow their own tunnels," the greenhorn muttered. "And—" his teeth gritted—"those swine know it." A moment later, "And, by heaven, it's this tunnel."

It was true. The whole stampede came thundering down this familiar passageway, splitting it apart, smashing ruin upon devastation. The ground trembled under its rushing weight. The tidal wave resolved itself into an avalanche of hurtling flesh and elemental sound.

THE man hidden beneath the greenery at the tunnel's mouth coolly held his ground. He knew his own power. His rifle roared into the tunnel. Giant throats screamed. Vast momentums impacted and recoiled. The avalanche piled up on itself. Pressure from behind split its front. Huge shapes staggered aside into the thick grass wall. Shouts from the man. Again his rifle roared.

An immense head in which little eyes gleamed bloodshot appeared out of the grass fringe and crashed into the dead yew tree. The whole great stem lurched over. The watcher and the little black man were catapulted from its root. The watcher, dazed, had the wit to roll under the lee of the fallen bole. Again a shouted curse and the rifle's roar. Muddy things moved close to the fallen

greenhorn's face. They were the tunnel man's boots. The greenhorn raised himself and stood behind the other. It was big Jan Ruys.

Ruys gave only a startled look and then aimed into the wrecked tunnel again. A huge bulk filled it like a rushing projectile. The heavy rifle roared. The bulk staggered but hurtled on, enormous, screaming rage. Only a shot placed in a spot as big as the palm of a hand could stop it—the most difficult shot in all elephant hunting. It was a charging, head-on shot, requiring lightning quick allowance for height and angle of head and thickness of trunk, with time for only one shot.

Ruys tore his rifle bolt out and back and aimed with a steady hand. The firing pin clicked upon emptiness. Ruys shouted a curse and stood. There was nothing else to do. His time, as it comes to most elephant hunters, had come to him.

The greenhorn snapped up his rifle and fired. The charging bulk became an avalanche slide, pushing great furrows of earth before its immense feet. The slide stopped within reaching distance of the muddy boots. The huge bulk rolled slowly and crushed a crackling hollow into the cane wall.

Ruys breathed noisily.

"Phe-ew! Gaw strike me if that ain't the damnedest tusker ever I seen. Knocked 'im endways harf a dozen times, an' he gets up an' keeps comin'."

He was admirably self-possessed in the face of his near obliteration. Suddenly he looked queerly at the greenhorn who had made that clean, cool shot. Then he shouted and crammed fresh cartridges into his gun to fire at a gray shape that milled in the tangled confusion.

The confusion broke up at last. Silence settled over the trampled tangle of what had been fresh, softly billowing jungle less than ten minutes before—ten tremendous minutes.

Then came shouts from the farther side. Shouts answered from the left. Ruys bellowed hoarsely. On the right remained silence. Ruys advanced slowly. He had to climb over the great carcass that blocked the tunnel. The greenhorn followed, wondering what lay beyond.

In a great niche in the tunnel wall formed by a falling mass lay an elephant. Beyond, in a flattened area of destruction lay another—a rounded heap that might have been a rock rising above the débris of greenery. Tusks gleamed white from a pile of twisted stems. Something bulked darkly beyond.

Ruys began to laugh, uncertainly at first, then in loud jubilation. His guffaw was a shout.

"Gawblime, but it's six ov 'em! An' I says to meself, 'Strike me if this ain't the toughest bull as ever I shot at.' Him keepin' a-comin' after I knocks 'im. Ee-yow! I'm a perisher if that ain't prize shootin'."

Joyous discovery shouts came from the other side of the slaughter pen. Ruys bellowed simian glee and tramped to meet them.

The greenhorn stood with tight pressed lips. He felt sick. Disgust swept over him in a hot wave. This was not shooting—it was a shambles. The little black man climbed upon a great rounded flank and squatted there upon his heels. Cynically he picked a snuff horn from his ear lobe and sniffed a pinch.

"It is a pity, bwana," he said, "that you did not hold your shot until after the charging elephant had taken that great ox. There would then have been only two to reckon with."

His master became aware of his presence and his eyes traveled then to where that human scream had been before the remainder of the herd had broken away. The little man clicked his tongue and his grimace was that of a pleased ape.

"That one was the Zanzibari," he said. "So screams a man when the elephant's foot is upon his belly."

The white man shivered. But his

eyes were on the bodies of slaughtered elephants, not in the direction of the late Zanzibari ivory poacher.

"Pah!" He spat. "Let's get out of here."

THE greenhorn sat in his tent alone. The others had broached a bottle from the rich sport's luxurious supplies and were celebrating their successful morning.

"Best show we ever had," said Mink McCarthy. "The perfect spot to catch 'em in. Never been another like it. Sixteen all told, and nine of 'em tuskers. And if that blighted Zanzibari hadn't been a fool we'd ha' got more. But I reckon it's close on eight hundred pounds of ivory at that, an' that's pretty good these days."

There was cause for rejoicing. But Jan Ruys had a disquieting note to inject. As sometimes happens to a stupid man, a keen idea had come into his mind earlier that morning; and it had taken root and grown alarmingly.

"This 'ere American bloke—" he lowered his great bull voice and looked cautiously out of his little eyes— "he ain't no tenderfoot sport. I seen 'im shoot. Clean an' cool as you an' me. I been thinkin' on that; an' d'yer know what?"

The others looked at him, ready for any suspicion, as in their business they had to be.

"Yer wanter know what I think?" He whispered the ill thought. "I'll bet yer he's no one else but that blarsted King feller."

The others started. Tino Corra pulled at his little mustache and considered the possibility. Mink McCarthy's keen wits raced over the pros and cons, while a tight frown contracted his brows under which his eyes glittered redly.

"Look at 'im," Ruys enlarged his accusation. "Tall an' big in the shoulder an' hard as nails. An' look at his niggers. The big feller—he's a Masai or I'm a bloody fool. An' the little un—he's the Hottentot. You've 'eard of Kingi Bwana an' his two men. We've all 'eard all about 'em. An' now I arsks yer: What's he doin' pretendin' he's a rich sport lost on a heap o' safari goods right in our road?"

Mink's narrow jaws set as if he were sinking sharp teeth into each item in turn and chewing upon it. And, as he digested each one, his face became harder and more deadly. Abstractedly, as he revolved the possibilities again, he reached for his rifle and began counting cartridges into the magazine. The vicious push of his thumb marked his decision on each separate point.

There was no more than suspicion that this man was the Kingi Bwana of camp-fire legend. But that did not matter. To those three in their ruthless game, it was sufficient that the man was not what he pretended to be.

Ruys swallowed a furious oath. He picked up his rifle with sudden resolve and made to stride for the stranger's tent. This thing would have to be finished then and there. Mink hissed throatily after him, his face bleak with rage. Quick as a small rodent, he rose and caught at Ruys's belt.

"You blasted fool!" he grated. "You'll be getting all of us lagged some day with your thick wit. Can't you see we'll have to take 'em all together—him and his niggers? If they're who you think, they're smart as monkeys. Let one of 'em escape as a witness, an' we'd be in the soup up to our necks."

Ruys stood, clumsily irresolute and half rebellious, till the blood-chilling common sense of his comrade soaked into his dull brain. Then he allowed himself to be dragged back. In a flat tone, conceding only a postponement, he said—

"When the big nigger comes to fix 'is tent an' the little devil is cookin'."

The three looked at one another, the eyes of all of them showing agreement. Slowly they nodded.

No fuss about this thing, no dramatics, without the necessity of speech.

Only a glance between men who understood one another.

The stranger kept to his tent. He could not bring himself to fraternize with those three under a pretense of amity. And the three—cold, unhurried, determined—watched for the appearance of the big tent boy.

Evening came. Unsuspiciously the stranger came out of his tent. Like a blanket-wrapped baboon the little Hottentot crouched over his cook pots. But the figure of the huge Masai was nowhere in sight.

Moodily the stranger sat down to eat. A gasoline pressure lantern flooded him and his Hottentot in clear white light. Each one of the waiting three was an expert rifle shot. But, inexplicably, no Masai came.

Night fell. The man who might be the redoutable Kingi Bwana retired to his tent. The three cursed in furious whispers and took turns to watch. Sooner or later the third witness would return to the camp—and then!

Dawn came. Mink, whose watch it was, kicked the others to snarling wakefulness.

It was just the tall stranger's luck and his inherent caution that had sent the big Masai with a message to Fort Portal, a long day's run distant.

THE three took council. If this were indeed the Kingi Bwana of camp-fire legend, they were up against wits as keen as all their own. Mink spat poisonous curses and fetched out a map. He pressed a pointed thumbnail upon it. His red eyes burned into the paper.

"We're too damned close to that blasted Fort Portal place. It's marked as a police outpost, curse it." The claw-like thumbnail cut a groove across the map. "There's the Semliki River. A day's fast trek beyond is the Belgian Congo border. If we can get to the river—"

Mink's fist slammed on to the map.

"By all hell, if we can get across I'll drop this fly cove at long range, I don't care who's with him or who isn't. Belgian Congo 'll be safe country, all right."

Ruys gazed at the map, judging distances. He breathed heavily. He was satisfied it could be done.

"Why not burn the two of 'em now an' make a run for it? We kin get there, ivory an' all, before anybody'd ketch up."

Mink looked at him with hate. He sneered, coldly venomous.

"Don't you ever think? D'you even know what month it is? How about if the rains are breaking on the Ruwenzori, an' the river's flooded forty foot deep an' a mile wide? Then where'd we go?"

Tino Corra showed his even teeth.

"Yess, shure. Bettaire we see first the rivaire."

Ruys was forced to curb his bloodthirsty impatience once more. But he fretted. If only that Masai would show up. During the midday halt he approached the busy little Hottentot, and with immense unconcern inquired about the other man.

He might as well have hoped to pit his wits against a wise old chimpanzee. The little black man chattered as volubly as an ape and dissembled as smoothly. Oh, the big Kaffir boy? He was careful not to name him a Masai. The clumsy great oaf had stepped upon a black scorpion and his leg had swelled up like an elephant's. So he had gone to the nearest witch doctor to have the poison magic performed. He would catch up with the safari when he was well. And maliciously the wizened imp added—

"Surely will that great black one catch up; for he is a great runner and can travel distance as the antelope travels."

Later the wise little one, suspicious as a monkey, related the episode to his master over the solitary lunch at the folding canvas table; and he quoted a proverb of his own people.

"When the ox seeks for information, then must it indeed be a matter of great importance."

King cogitated over this news, his eyes very narrow, squinting out under the corners to empty distance. He fired a short question or two at the Hottentot. He whistled a tuneless air through his teeth. Then he shrugged. His bleached brows met in a straight line over his eyes. He shrugged again. With his hands deep in his breeches pockets he sauntered over to where the three squatted, heads together.

Smiling a little grimly, King teetered on widespread legs and looked down on them.

"Well," he challenged, "it seems we know each other. Now what?"

Three sets of ferocious eyes glowered at him. The three were ready for fight on the drop of a hat. But King's thumbs were hooked into his belt; and a belt holster hung at the very heel of his hand. Like the grating hiss of a ferret came Mink's words:

"Get to hell outa here before we send you sudden, you blasted police spy! Yes, sure we know you. We've heard plenty about you, but nothing that low."

King's smile was like a knife blade. He shook his head.

"Not spy. But something nobody's ever heard about me yet—deputy warden."

His voice hardened to match the smile.

"I don't give a hoot what you crooks may have done down Rhodesia way—whom you've bumped off or why. That belongs to the police. It's none of my *shauri*. But this filthy thing that you've just done is right up my street. It's the personal affair of every decent white man in Africa."

Mink smiled grimly at King.

"All right. D'you think you're going to arrest the three of us, Mr. Holy Man Game Warden Deputy?"

King knew very well he could not. While he had the drop on them just now, he had far too much respect for their collective wit to think that he could divert his attention from the group and concentrate it upon the disarming of any one man. They were all three fast and expert shots.

Mink kept his grin.

"I'd advise you to get to hell away," he spat forth again. "And you're damned lucky the breaks came the way they did. Get away—before the breaks maybe take a turn."

Again King shook his head. The smile had gone from his face; only the steely hardness was left.

"Oh, no. We don't exactly part just yet. Of course, I don't like you civet cats well enough to safari along with you. But you're not fools enough to think I won't stick right on your trail; and I'm sure you're not fools enough to try and bushwhack me as long as one of my boys remains at large. So we understand one another. I'm going to take you boys in, if I can. And you're going to do me in, if you dare."

He stood awhile longer, surveying their rage with sardonic grimness. Then he turned and left them.

Mink's grin became the throaty growl of an animal nuzzling its meat. But at no time did he lose his alertness. With a quick look he satisfied himself that Jan Ruys was making no rash move. Then very meaningly, for his friends to hear:

"We daren't bushwhack you? You think you're going to take us in. You hope? You're damn right, you hellion Yankee! We dare do nothing, until we're sure we can cross the Semliki River."

King had no fear of turning his back upon the three. He understood fully the insurance of one of his men remaining alive as a witness. To the Hottentot he said:

"We move camp swiftly. And from now on we must be as wary as the gray jackal and as sleepless as the rock snake."

The Hottentot grimaced. White man's squeamishness was a permanent sore point with him.

"Did I not say, bwana, that it would have been better to have let the elephant

take that one? So there would be now only two. Even as we—" he whispered hissingly through his teeth— "even as we are two."

King was inwardly pleased at the little man's loyal hint at cooperation. But he said gruffly:

"The Masai will be returning at the hour of dusk. He surely must be met and warned. For this is our insurance: that at no time shall the three of us be seen in one place at the same time."

Without requiring to be told, the astute little man understood the significance of that thought; and on the instant he had a thought to add.

"It is well. It is, therefore, in my head that this night bwana shall watch in the *boma* alone, as sleepless as the rock snake; and like the gray jackal, the Masai and I, we shall creep in and stab those three as they sleep."

"Out!" ordered King. "Out, little murderer! And make speed to move from these evil associations that corrupt the morals of an ape."

AND so that strangely divided safari trekked on its way—closely bound together, hating and helpless, hard bound by diametrically opposing restrictions. Either party was willing to do the other deadly hurt; yet each found its hands quite securely tied. Kingi Bwana could make no foolish play against those three experienced gunmen unless he could separate them. They dared not attack him unless they could get his trio all together. And somewhere in the bush, hurrying along to add the hazard of win or lose to the game, came the police from Fort Portal.

At last they reached the river. When the long line of wild fig trees that marked its course showed on the horizon, even the coldly calculating Mink was impelled to hurry. The game depended upon the river's condition. When they came near enough to look over the brim of its gully, Ruys capered uncouthly and shouted.

Down at the bottom of the great swath gouged by the monsoon into the plain a wide gray ribbon zigzagged—a good two hundred yards wide, but width mattered nothing. The water was at the bottom, not racing level with the top as it might have been.

"Here's where we settle that interferin' blighter's hash," Ruys rejoiced vindictively.

Mink McCarthy's expression was split in a lipless grin.

"Plenty of time yet," he purred. "Plenty time. We'll send the ivory over first. That son of a long legged snoop will come sticking his nose into the game sooner or later; an' then, when we're safe over—" He chuckled croakingly.

Presently a long line of black figures was stringing across the wide gray ribbon. Long white arcs gleamed on their shoulders, submerged in places. Neck deep it was and cold from the Ruwenzori heights, but easily fordable.

And presently, as prognosticated, King arrived to stick his nose into the game. Only he and the Hottentot were in sight.

Warily watching the men, his hand on his pistol butt, he surveyed the scene. It promised to be a very successful escape, unless the police should suddenly arrive like a cinema miracle. But the river seemed to offer an obstacle.

King spoke banteringly, but with a hard edge to his tone.

"Kinda like the riddle about the missionaries and the cannibals, no?"

"Meanin'?" Mink was quickly hostile.

King grinned amiably.

"Meaning the little matter of getting across. It's going to be difficult shooting for you gentlemen out in the deep spots."

Mink was suddenly affable.

"Don't you worry about that, you blasted Yank. We're not silly."

He drew his grinning friends away. Even the surly Ruys was good humored.

"Now listen," he told them. "I go first. You cover this smart Yank till I'm across. I'll hold a bead on him while Tino comes. And then the two of us covers you. And when we're all across—" he cackled harshly— "I'll lay you fifty pounds of tusk I drop him first." Suddenly he was savage. "Follow us, will he, the blasted swine! Only thing I'm sorry about is we don't get the big nigger too."

The plan was perfect. Mink waded in. He had to hold his rifle above his head out in the middle of the stream, but he had no difficulty in making it. On the far side he scrambled up the steep bank and settled himself with his back to the bush fringe, his elbows on his knees, his rifle held comfortably and steadily. He looked frail and insignificant nearly three hundred yards away; but nobody, least of all King, had any impression that the man was not deadly.

Tino Corra showed white teeth to King.

"Goodbai, senhor," he told him fondly. "Pairhaps I don' see you no more. Pairhaps nobody see you nevair no more."

He chuckled sweetly, scrambled down the bank and waded in.

King stood looking across the water. Big Jan Ruys, his back to the river, stood warily watching King, a heavy grin on his face about an impending joke that King did not know.

King scarcely looked at Ruys. His attention was all on the farther side of the river where Mink sat venomously waiting, blending with his protective coloring into the bush fringe behind him.

Hawk-like, King watched that distant figure, himself waiting for something to happen. The little Hottentot standing behind him balanced on one foot and writhed in excitement over imminent happenings. King's eyes, puckered hard and narrow in the sun, dropped for a moment to Tino Corra laboring in midstream. From him they flashed to Jan Ruys.

Ruys stiffened to alertness. He had a wholesome respect for King's wit. Had he stood alone, nervousness might have impelled him to draw a gun and precipitate a showdown. But there was comforting assurance in the steady rifle of the cold blooded Mink a scant three hundred yards across the river—an assurance of deadly precision that King fully shared. So King only stood and waited.

Jan Ruys was reassured that King knew enough not to try any foolhardy tricks against the double hazard. He felt that he could indulge in a little heavy humor before his turn to cross over.

"Yer been pretty smart, Yank, ain't yer? Well, Mink over there—" he jerked his head backward— "he's pretty smart too. Me, I'll be across there in a couple minutes." He guffawed at the thought of the long range sport that was due to commence as soon as he should be safely across. "Then you'll see how smart Mink is. He's been a damn sight too smart for a whole lot o' damned copper spies. An' he's been too smart for you."

King, tensely watching, found it in himself to grin back at the confident Ruys. Ruys instantly confronted him again with pig-eyed suspicion. So it was that he hid not see the swift events that began to take place on the other side.

And Mink, too, all his concentration fixed upon this direction from the far side, did not see what was shaping behind him. Only Tino Corra, up to his neck in water, facing Mink, saw.

TWO stalwart black arms emerged from the bush fringe behind Mink McCarthy. Mink, intent upon the sights of his rifle lined up on King's broad chest, heard not a thing, never daring to relax his attention or look about him. He knew much better than did Ruys how suddenly capable King might be of outwitting the big dullard.

Tino Corra, watching catastrophe shape itself, shrieked warning. Gray water swirled about his neck. His eyes bulged; his mouth gaped to shout. One arm holding his rifle clear waved frantically. The other arm emerged and joined it.

"Behind! Guard you behind!" Tino gurgled in his sick frenzy.

King whooped his sudden satisfaction. The little Hottentot shrieked like a steam whistle and flung his arms aloft in a demoniac leap.

Mink trained his eyes over his front sight to see what all this fuss was about. He could make nothing of the bobbing head and splashing arms out in the river. They pointed behind him; but arms pointing out of nothing are indefinite as to direction. Some damned stupidity on the fool's part, Mink was savagely deciding. Then the strong black arms descended upon him from behind.

Tino Corra shrieked his final despair. Jan Ruys snatched a look behind, and at that instant King rushed him.

Jan's quick glance over his shoulder only half took in what was happening. He turned heavily to meet King's catlike onslaught. There was not time to get his gun into play. King was at hand grips with him; and Ruys, burly, great brute that he was, felt a stab of apprehension at the expertness and power of those long, steel sinewed arms.

But Ruys was a tough barroom fighter. Though taken aback, he had the ingrained instinct to swing his hips away and to drive his knee hard for his opponent's groin.

King wilted with the numbing shock of it. He had been appraising this great bull of a man and all his instinct of competitive combat had been anticipating the inevitable tussle for the showdown. But here was no time for pretty fighting. With set teeth he clung to the cursing, shouting ox, and managed to get his pistol free. Grunting, he swung it upward. Its barrel collided with a sharp snap against the protruding bone behind the other's ear. Ruys went down without a struggle or a sound.

Tino Corra was floundering in shallower water, trying to get his rifle into play. King dropped behind Ruys's bulk. The Hottentot flung his rifle to him. King lay panting, the rifle thrust out over Ruys's side, like a cavalryman behind his fallen horse.

"Drop that!" he shouted. "Drop it! Right into the river!"

Corra had heard as much about King's marksmanship as King had heard about Mink McCarthy's. Only for a glaring moment he hesitated. He could see King's head. His own head and chest were clear of the water, but the current whirled about his legs. Slowly he let his gun drop.

"So!" King shouted, and his tenseness relaxed. "Now come ashore. This side. And don't try anything with the pistol in your belt."

On the farther bank Mink McCarthy and the strong black arms had disappeared, swallowed up into the bush fringe that remained as peacefully blank as when Mink had disposed himself against it. But King had no apprehensions on that score.

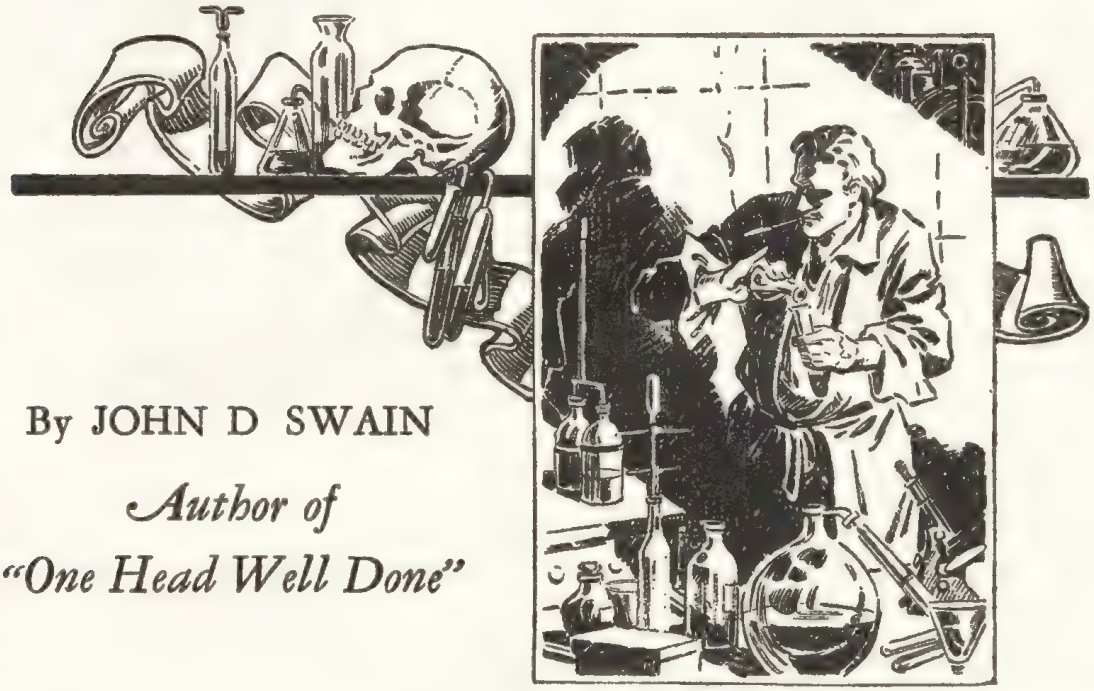
Painfully he flexed his body while the Hottentot tied both men up with as many twists and knots as a monkey would use.

"Good," said King, and he smiled with pinched lips. "Sit on them while I go and help the Masai bring that other one across. Then the two of you can round up those ivory porters. The men from Fort Portal ought to be along any time now."

A blend of indignation and grim satisfaction chased the pain from his face, as he growled to himself—

"Go murdering elephants wholesale, will they?"

The LAST MAGICIAN



By JOHN D SWAIN

Author of
"One Head Well Done"

THERE must be many elderly people who remember the magician billed as Albertus Magnus, who retired from the stage years ago. Many of his famous illusions remain a mystery even to his fellows of the Society of Magicians. A frank materialist —an atheist, in fact—to him a miracle was unthinkable, and life after death a pathetic wish-fulfilment. On retiring as a public entertainer, he devoted his life to the exposure of fraud. He became the terror of mediums and faddists. He slept in hundreds of haunted houses and investigated alleged cases of the mischievous *poltergeist*.

His travels took him to India and Africa, to Tibet and Haiti and the Pacific isles. Nowhere did he find a medicine man, a juju or voodoo doctor, whose feats he could not duplicate or excel. Observing the strict rule of the Society of Magicians, he disclosed no major secrets of his profession; but he was careful to insist that his most amazing effects were the product of methods available to any skilled mechanic.

I knew him well for many years; and when in an idle moment I asked him if ever in his life he had encountered something, however trivial, that he could not explain away, something that persistently eluded his cold analyses, he surprised me by replying unhesitatingly:

"Of course! Who has not?"

And then he told me of the last magician, the man over whose forlorn grave he had set a headstone deeply inscribed with the words the stranger had requested.

It happened—he told me—in the period when he was the leading magician on the Big Time. Between engagements he was at work on his new illusion. Nothing else interested him. He had begun as a mere juggler, elated when he was able to keep four billiard balls in the air at once, or to produce a rabbit

from a hat. He had become the greatest card manipulator of his time—probably of all time. I think he was the first one to develop the "rising card" trick. But he had put all this sleight-of-hand stuff behind him, and devoted himself to the spectacular and sometimes actually terrifying illusions for which he is remembered.

These required a profound knowledge of physics and electricity, an uncanny use of lights and mirrors, and mechanisms at once as delicate as a ship's chronometer and as powerful as a traveling crane. It is said that the best of them were as puzzling to rival magicians as to the crowds in the theaters where he appeared. He had made a great deal of money, and he expended it in travel and the exposure of charlatans.

"I was working in a great loft at the top of a ramshackle building down on the East Side," he said. "It was a deserted brick warehouse. It suited me admirably, for nobody disturbed me at work, which often lasted the entire night through."

It must have been a queer sort of place—vast, dusty, its small window panes so thick with soot and grime that they were barely translucent. He had installed powerful electric lights, and there was a long work-bench with every necessary tool, including a motor and lathe. Another bench held retorts and chemicals; and, leaning against the walls, were costly French mirrors, draped in black velvet, that caught and tossed back and forth his solitary figure until at times the old attic seemed thronged with replicas of himself seen from every angle. A skeleton grinned from one corner; and the beautifully modeled wax figure of a young girl, clad in costly robes, smiled back at it.

The whole effect was not unlike the laboratory of a medieval alchemist. But Albertus Magnus, who could at will produce a gold coin from a street beggar's shoe, and had often done so, knew that no alchemist had ever succeeded in transmuting a base metal into gold; and that, using the resources of natural science, he could do more than any conjurer of the African jungle, more than the soothsayers of ancient Egypt.

He was working at the time on one of his most famous illusions—billed as the Headless Woman. As perfected, a personable young woman advanced to the apron of the stage and removed her head from her body, holding it well out by its hair. The disembodied head talked and sang and answered questions. After which the woman replaced her head, smiled and walked from the stage. It was by no means his greatest illusion, but it was one of the most popular; and, because of sundry problems of reflection and refraction, one of the most technically difficult to perfect. He had spent many nights in his lonely attic, working with mirrors and lights and the wax model, when there took place the incident that continued to disturb him to the end of his life.

IT WAS a cold, damp night in early November. The street in which the warehouse stood was one of small foundries, repair shops and dingy lofts. After six o'clock it was as quiet as a village thoroughfare. From the distant river came warning whistles of tugs and small craft. The shrill cries of children, the honk of horns, softened by distance, made their way from teeming tenement districts that hemmed in this ill paved, poorly lighted street. Through gaps in the casements coiling fingers of fog stole to disappear in the brightly lighted attic where the Great Albert worked steadily, shifting a mirror here, changing a spotlight there, putting on the finishing touches to his latest creation, the Headless Woman. Tomorrow he would begin work with the girl, his assistant, an apt and clever pupil.

Midnight had passed; and the magician had paused to drink a cup of the black coffee which he always kept percolating on an electric heater when he worked late at night. He lighted a cig-

aret and relaxed, with the comfortable feeling that his labor was practically ended. The great illusion needed only a few final adjustments of the side mirrors. He was not tired or sleepy, and his eyes ranged over that end of his workroom where, in built-in cases, hundreds of books—some of them old and almost priceless, others the very latest treatises on mechanical engineering, optics, chemistry—were stacked. He was trying to make up his mind whether to switch off the lights, lock up and return to his hotel at the other end of town, or to read himself sleepy. And it was then that his ears caught the sound of running feet mounting the worn wooden flights leading to his lofty retreat.

He was not in the least alarmed; merely curious. No visitors came here. He had not disclosed his address even to his friends, for it was essential to his work that he be free from interruptions. There was nothing here to attract burglars. He carried only a little pocket money. He wore a cheap wristwatch. Marauders might have caused him great annoyance, but would hardly be tempted by the odd junk the loft contained.

Trained by his profession to be an acute observer, he sensed in the tempo of the approaching footsteps something frightened, the sound of one fleeing from dreadful peril; and it occurred to him that it was some night prowler, pursued by police and, finding the warehouse door unlocked, darting within for sanctuary. The stranger would make for the top story, where a skylight led to the roof. Albertus Magnus sat quietly smoking, his eyes fixed with languid curiosity upon the door, which as usual was unbarred.

It burst open, and there entered an old man neatly but shabbily dressed, who closed the door behind him and stood looking about him from eyes sunk deep in his parchment-like face adorned with a straggly gray beard.

It was impossible to guess his age. It might have been a full century, the magician thought, as he lazily surveyed him through the curling smoke of his cigaret. An old East Side Jew, probably. Some of them looked as old as the mummies of the Pharaohs in museums. The man seemed to be dried up like a mummy. His clothes flapped about his bony limbs; but, despite his hurried climb up four flights of stairs, he did not pant, nor was any tinge of color visible on his cheeks. Only his eyes seemed alive; they were large, brilliant and eloquent with some unspoken need.

They came to rest upon the placid face of the tenant.

"You are known as Albertus Magnus, the magician?"

"I am."

He laid his cigaret upon its copper tray. Its smoke ascended in a curious spiral thread that curtseyed and wavered in the draft. And at the windows the fingers of the fog continued to pry, to thrust into the room their clammy tentacles. From far away, down the harbor, a bellbuoy sounded its melancholy note as the tide turned.

The old man cast a fearful glance over his shoulder and seemed to listen. Then he advanced to the middle of the great room, resting one skinny claw upon a great flat-top desk that was at the moment free of the books, papers and drawings the magician had but now cleared away. It was composed, this desk top, of a single thick slab of plate glass, which dimly reflected the queer figure leaning over it.

"How did you know that I was Albertus Magnus and that I work here?"

The old man shook his head impatiently and frowned.

"There is no time to explain that. I know all about you! You are a great inventor and a skeptic. You mock unspeakable mysteries and believe nothing that you can not weigh and measure and analyze. But you are, I suppose, a gentleman. You know enough to keep a civil tongue in your head, and to remain quiet. Listen! *I am the last magician;* and my hours are numbered. Even now they are tracking me down—

the mockers and the skeptics who destroy my works."

A lunatic! Great Albert smiled to himself. Deranged, and having somehow learned where to find him, the old man had come to mystify him by some elementary hocus-pocus. It was a common occurrence; all over the world he had been pestered by crackbrained miracle workers, who sometimes really believed that they possessed supernatural powers and insisted upon confounding him with a demonstration that always proved to be pitifully weak and clumsy.

Tonight, relaxing after hours of intense concentration, Albertus Magnus was in the mood to humor the old codger; and because he felt sorry for him he promised himself not to make fun of him, or hurt his feelings in any way. And when the man had displayed his little bag of tricks, he would lock up and take the poor fellow to some decent chop house, give him a square meal and a dollar or two, say good night and forget him.

The old man's eyes burned into his own. There was a fearful anxiety in his regard; a genuine agony of apprehension. Once again he seemed to be listening for something outside the door.

"I have your promise? Your oath? To keep silent, not to speak or move and thus break my spell?"

Albertus Magnus promised.

"If you do not keep me too long," he qualified.

The stranger sighed in relief.

"It will not be long," he said.

WITH no further words the old man closed his eyes and began to breathe deeply, inhaling and exhaling slowly and rhythmically.

Albertus Magnus watched, amused. Rhythmic breathing was a part of all the ancient rituals. His studies in physiology had led him to know that it could produce odd results. Nothing mysterious, of course; but definitely interesting to the student. Groups of children, breathing in unison, could with their fingertips alone lift a recumbent comrade—a game played by youngsters of all races.

For a few moments the old man stood rigid, only the slow rise and fall of his chest indicating life. Then, very gently, he laid himself face downward upon the flat top of the desk, his elbows bent, palms pressed downward upon the glass. And inch by inch, pushing with his hands, he began to raise his rigid body from the surface.

The magician noted with interest that the old man was balancing perfectly. Presently his body was clear of the desk, supported by his hands. This in itself was a considerable feat, requiring great muscular strength as well as perfect equilibrium. As performed by a man so incredibly old and emaciated, whose bony wrists were larger than his arms, it won the magician's admiration. But now a further development caused his eyes to widen in genuine amazement. For, still thrusting downward, the old man at length held his body aloft at the full extent of his straightened arms; and, having done this, inch by inch his palms rose from the glass surface until he was poised solely by his fingertips. No gymnast known to Albertus Magnus could do this thing that the old man was doing!

Breathing quietly, sitting motionless as he had promised, the magician beheld first one, then another of the man's fingers curl up from the desk, until at length he was supported wholly by his two forefingers. And then by one. Then before Albert's stunned gaze the last finger softly, lingeringly left the glass, the arms were extended straight down the sides, and there floated in the air the rigid body of his strange visitor!

"Remember," Albertus Magnus explained to me, "levitation is one of the tricks in every wandering magician's repertory. It is the oldest one of all. We find it in the stories of the Magic Carpet. It cropped up in witchcraft times—the old woman riding the mid-

night skies on her broomstick. Novelists have played with it; Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and scores of lesser lights. The most universal dream is that in which we fly. Birds are among the earliest primitive symbols.

"To float in air, to free ourselves from the fetters of gravity, is as old as the mind of man. It unquestionably bore its part in the development of the airplane. Every magician has his own formula for faking levitation. With all of them I am as familiar as I am with my own illusions. Never have I witnessed a new variant as developed by one of my brother magicians, without solving it and being able to duplicate it, or improve upon it.

"Yet, as I looked upon the body of this old man, I was dumbfounded. He had brought with him no apparatus, and he was under the pitiless light of my most powerful electric lamp. Catalepsy? Quite likely. But catalepsy can not render the subject immune to the pull of gravity! And I was, and am, an utter skeptic. A miracle is to me just a story for children."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Do? I did what any one would have done—only I did it with more than usual care. I rose very quietly and came to where the old man was poised above my desk. I did not touch him, but I was within inches of him. I passed my arms above, below, around him. Nothing! Then I passed a wooden hoop the length of his body, twisting and turning it to detect any invisibly fine wires. There were none, of course. Could have been none! For my eyes had never left him, and I was a trained observer.

"I removed the desk. He was now poised some five feet above the floor. And I could not tell what kept him there!

"Then I moved the desk back, spread upon its glass surface some cushions, so that were he to fall suddenly he would not hurt himself against the hard surface. And I had just stepped back when, for the second time that night, there sounded a drumming of feet on the stairs, and with it a confusion of bawling voices.

Again the door opened.

Two blue-uniformed men burst in. They were red faced, rather good natured looking chaps, and their vizored caps bore the name of a State asylum for the insane.

"There's the old geezer now!" one of them cried. "He sure did give us a run for our money!"

He moved toward the desk, upon which now lay the body of the old man, eyes open, a look of despair upon his face.

"Don't let them take me back!" he screamed. "They are all fools! They laugh at me and keep me from proving what I am and can do. Save me!"

One of the men turned to Albertus Magnus.

"You know him?" he asked.

"Never saw him until he came in half an hour ago."

"Perfectly harmless; but crazy as a loon. Thinks he's the Almighty, or something, and that he can work miracles. We humor him generally. Tonight he gave us the slip, and we've been all over the East Side looking for him."

The magician offered to look out for him; to be personally responsible. But the attendant shook his head and then explained:

"I'd lose my job if I failed to bring him back. But don't you worry about him. He gets the best of care. Kind of favorite at the big house. Makes a lot of fun for us, he does! Not ugly or destructive or plain mean, like so many of 'em are.

"Come along, grandpa! It's long past bedtime."

Weeping and wringing his hands, the old man was led forth with a sort of jovial firmness; and presently the outer door slammed, silence crept back and the Great Albert shut off the lights and went home.

THE following week was a busy one, for he was rehearsing his girl assistant and adding the final touches to his illusion. There ensued a few days before he opened at the New Olympia; and he went out to the State asylum and inquired for his strange visitor.

The superintendent informed him that the old man had passed away in his sleep the night following his escapade; he could give but scanty details of his history.

"Nice old feller," the superintendent said. "We all liked him. But nobody knows who he was or where he came from. Been here for years—was here when I came. Thought he could perform miracles or something. Maybe the boys used to plague him a little. He'd start to demonstrate—as he called it—and warn 'em to keep perfectly still. Then just as he was going off into a fit or trance or something, somebody'd give him the Bronx cheer, or snicker, and break the spell. Used to make the old chap sore as a pup! But nobody ever abused him. He had the run of the place. That's how he managed to scram out of here the night he turned up at your place. Y'know, I kind of miss the poor old nut!"

He took the visitor out to the little cemetery where lay those patients who had died nameless and indigent. His grave was marked by a small board bearing a number; the nurses had leaned a wreath of artificial flowers against it.

Little more could be learned from the physician in charge.

"We never even learned his name," confessed Dr. Emil Luckner. "Nor his age, nor antecedents. It was rumored that he had been a Jewish rabbi back in Russia. He read Hebrew and Greek and Latin and Arabic, and was fluent in half a dozen modern languages. Not much of a reader, though. Paranoiac. Suffered from delusions of grandeur and persecution. Down on the East Side he had lived a hand-to-mouth existence. The children brought their pets to him to be cured. But he also pretended to cure human beings. They claimed he had raised a child from the dead. That sort of thing wouldn't do, of course. For his own sake we took charge of him and made him comfortable."

Dr. Luckner pulled a drawer at his side and from it took a sealed envelop addressed in a sprawling hand:

"To Albertus Magnus, when he comes."

"That's your name, isn't it?" asked the doctor.

"My stage name, yes."

"Well, the old man left it with me to give you."

He stared with some curiosity as Albertus Magnus read the brief line. It was a simple request as to a headstone and its inscription. He passed the note over to Luckner.

"I'd rather like to carry out his request, if there's no objection," he said.

"None whatever! It will be a kindly and harmless tribute, even if meaningless!"

ALBERTUS MAGNUS, creator of illusions, a materialist who knew that magic is an affair of speed, dexterity and misdirection, offered me a cigaret and lighted one himself.

"So I did it," he said. "I had a plain marble headstone set up, lettered as he had wished: 'Here Lies The Last Magician'."

"And you never found out—that is, you didn't find—any explanation?"

The Great Albert interrupted me irritably.

"If I had there wouldn't be any story! I've tried to forget it. Time and again when I've been lecturing, exposing hoaxes and superstitions and fakes, there has floated between me and my audience the wraith of that old, old man, rigid and inert above my desk in the warehouse attic."

HURRICANE SHIP

By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

Author of "Mister Mate"

THE young master of the broad-beamed, ancient little schooner gazed wrathfully into the eye of the northeast trade wind. There, in plain sight, lay his destination.

It was a green and mountainous island, as fair as the mirage of an oasis to a thirst-stricken caravan. And, as Captain Rob Hall muttered to himself, just about as unattainable. Columbus himself had named that isle, the gem of the Caribbean, Dominica; but what interested Rob was that almost a hundred tons of cargo waited there for the *Fair Hope*—if he could ever get her that far to windward!

Though close-hauled to the northeasterly breeze, the schooner crabbed sluggishly through the deep blue water with her head about west-northwest. Rob Hall himself gripped the wheel as if shackled to it; but not even his skill could make the vessel point closer. By a bunch of gulf weed floating alongside he gaged her drift.

"A mouthful of loose teeth is all anybody'd get off me for saying there's nothing either fair or hopeful about the *Fair Hope*," her skipper, thin as a boathook and almost as handsome, confided in exasperation to his mate. "But it's true. The left-handed daughter of a Dutch galleon! Only not so fast!"

"I'll not contradict ye," said Mr. MacCready cautiously.

The brawny, red headed Scot sat on the edge of the cabin skylight, full in the blaze of the sun. He closed one light blue eye to enable the other to peer through a length of copper tubing.

"She's the Old Woman of the Sea!" Rob raged. "I had more meat on my bones and a lot more cash in my pants when I bought her. But she won't sail. She's too slow for even these sleepy islands. I'm her slave and paymaster."

"Aye," said MacCready.

"But now I'm through! I'm quitting! There's a limit to even my blasted foolishness. Once we clean up this lime-

juice shipment, you're out of a job, Mac. And so am I, unless you'll accept this hooker as a gift and give me a job."

"Thank ye kindly, no!" said MacCready hastily.

Rob clawed the spokes in feverish impatience.

"We'll rot to punk and wormholes before you get that motor running."

"Aye; we may do that. I'm not fast wi' my fingers, an' she has a good start on me now."

Rob disregarded the observation. He glared to eastward, where a dingy little steamship was outlined against wooded Martinique.

"Why's the *Grenadier* altering her course?" he muttered. "Looks as if she was going to speak us."

For a moment he forgot the drifting schooner to gaze hopefully at the other ship. There were small consignments of freight which were not profitable for the steamship to handle. Perhaps Phil Tolliver, the smart young shipmaster newly appointed to command the *Grenadier,* was going out of his way a few hundred yards to give the *Fair Hope* a tip.

The little cargo steamship swept in under the stern of the crawling schooner. The new master, his plump figure resplendent in white duck uniform, hailed the skipper of the *Fair Hope.*

"Hurricane warning!" he megaphoned. "Center north of Barbados, heading northwest."

Hall jerked his startled eyes toward the sky. He noted a delicate cirrus haze. Waving his hand, he shouted a word of thanks, called one of the three negro hands to the wheel and dived toward the barometer. He had noticed that it was quite high, and now he realized that the mercury in the tube was beginning to pump restlessly—a bad sign.

On the foredeck of the *Fair Hope* the two others of the crew, a coal-black Barbadian and a coffee colored stripling from Guadeloupe, were turning gray and green respectively. Hurricane! Mr. MacCready squinted silently but with renewed interest through the fuel line.

"South-southwest," Hall commanded the helmsman, and slacked off the main sheet.

"We've got to run away while the trade wind lasts," he muttered to Mr. MacCready. "Hell only knows how long that will be. You can count on the center of a hurricane moving between west and north down here—and that's toward us."

"Aye," said Doug MacCready. "If I could only get this motor goin' now, we'd be better off."

"Slow as a lame snail though she is, she's stout," Hall conceded. "She'd stand a hurricane better than some."

He glanced toward the *Grenadier,* which was steaming once more toward the port of Fort-de-France, in Martinique.

"She'd stand the pinch o' Greenland ice," replied MacCready with conviction. "But let's not be overhardy."

With the wind on her port quarter the *Fair Hope,* her foresail and main winged out on opposite sides, wallowed deliberately in the direction of safety, and farther from the limejuice waiting at Dominica.

Hall watched the sky alertly. He must heave to on the starboard tack before the gale struck. But while he could he made southing and wondered why the northeast trade held so steady.

SIX days later the *Fair Hope* crawled close to the beach in Roseau Roads, Dominica, and let go her anchor. The schooner had run well to the southward. Then, experiencing no more than heavy rain and slowly shifting winds, she had gone back on her course once more.

Rob's face was faintly wrinkled. He dropped at once into one of the cluster of shore boats and was pulled to the wharf.

The cargo of limejuice and cocoa was gone. The *Grenadier,* after her call at Martinique, had returned to Dominica and picked it up.

"Where was the center of that hurri-

cane on Tuesday morning?" Rob asked the shipping agent. His gaunt face was ironed out into utter smoothness now.

The fat English broker looked at him.

"You needn't have worried, Captain. A ship up in Latitude 22 reported a bit of a twister. But this island is on about Latitude 15, y'know—several hundred miles farther south."

Hall nodded.

"I know," he agreed through tightening lips. "The hurricane center was north of Barbados; just how far north, Captain Tolliver omitted to tell me."

The broker looked at him with startled eyes.

"I say!" he remarked. "Then Tolliver's going a bit strong. Old John Belden, who owns the *Grenadier* and commanded her till he retired three months ago to live on St. Thomas, wouldn't stand for that sort of competition. Shall I drop a word—he still has both eyes glued on the *Grenadier*, and—"

Rob Hall shook his head.

"Leave Tolliver to me and leave Belden out of it," he said. "Blast that pudgy schemer; he's hooked me in a way he hasn't reckoned—he's keeping me in business."

He pushed his way through a swarm of beggars and returned to the schooner.

"No cargo, Mac, but you still have a job," he reported to the sun-blistered Scot, who was cleaning spark plugs. "I won't quit under fire, not while I have a nickel left. Damn that fat trickster; not while I can borrow money will I stop!"

"A costly thing, pride," MacCready commented when he heard the story. "But I'll not say ye're wrong, Rob; and the time might come when I could get the motor to run."

On the next call at Bridgetown, Barbados, Hall sunk a bit of his remaining cash in a radio set—not a transmitter, but an obsolete battery type receiver. Hurricane insurance.

The schooner still lay in Carlisle Bay when the *Grenadier* came smoking into port. She let her hook drop close to the berth of the blunt-bowed *Fair Hope*. From her bridge Captain Tolliver, spotless as ever, waved a cheery greeting to Rob Hall. Rob did not return the greeting.

In the cool of the evening, as the sun dropped rapidly toward the horizon, Captain Tolliver and his mate approached the schooner in a shore boat. The stout young master of the *Grenadier* was over the rail before Hall could come out of the cabin to receive him.

"Sorry about that limejuice, old man," Tolliver said lightly. "My radio operator garbled the hurricane warning, and when they offered me the shipment—well, what would you have done?"

Rob Hall slowly shut his mouth and opened his fists. Being a shipmaster himself, he did not like to doubt the word of a brother skipper.

"Thought I'd drop aboard and look over your craft," Tolliver said briskly. Delicately he dusted off one knee which had touched the rail of the schooner. "Mr. Carey, here—" he indicated his mate—"is interested in marine relics too."

Hall stiffened again. The visit was not a success. Captain Tolliver, with his mate very much a-grin, inspected the schooner thoroughly if not approvingly.

"I suppose you couldn't get four knots out of her going downhill in a hurricane," he said sympathetically.

Hall grunted, restraining himself sternly. The grin on Mr. Carey's broad face widened until it looked as if the top of his head might fall off.

Doug MacCready, who had been ashore to purchase more parts for the motor, clambered over the side. His jaw dropped at sight of the two captains standing on the same deck.

After a moment of inspection Mac broke into the conversation.

"I've been havin' a crack wi' the radio operator of the *Grenadier*," he said, regarding one of his knuckles. "He's not a canny lad. For the good o' his looks he should ha' asked me if I were one o'

the *Fair Hope's* before he told me what a fine job Captain Tolliver had put over on us."

Tolliver, near the Jacob's ladder that hung over the rail, swung a leg on to it immediately. He spoke fast—faster than Hall could move.

"My owner, John Belden of St. Thomas, is interested in your schooner, Captain Hall."

For the second time that day Rob controlled his wrath.

Captain Tolliver took several nimble steps down the ladder. Then he halted, with his head on the level of the rail. He nodded sagely at Hall.

"I think he wants her, Captain."

Wide-mouthed, Doug MacCready stared at Tolliver's head.

"What for?" Doug demanded.

Captain Tolliver took his time about explaining.

"Old Captain Belden has a little place overlooking the harbor," he said at last. "He's fond of his boat, and he fusses about in the garden, too."

"Well?"

"He wants the *Fair Hope* so he can drag her ashore and plant geraniums in her," Tolliver bellowed and instantly ducked below the rail.

Hall's sheath knife flashed in his hand. With one slash he cut the worn ropes of the ladder. Captain Tolliver was only two rungs above his boat. Unfortunately the boat was a foot or more from the side of the schooner.

The *Grenadier's* plump master plunked into the green bay. When he came up he was still clutching the ladder. His uniform plainly showed the effects of scraping along the foul side of the schooner.

Freed of inhibitions by his skipper's action, Douglas MacCready thrust briskly at the *Grenadier's* mate. Mr. Carey swarmed over the rail and jumped for the stern sheets of the boat. He landed hard, balanced frantically for an instant and flopped into the water.

"Throw 'em a nickel," Mr. MacCready suggested, leaning easily on the rail. " 'Tis wonderful how clever these diving boys are."

NOT until three weeks later did the master of the *Grenadier* manage to get back at the *Fair Hope*. In St. John's harbor, Antigua, he steamed toward the schooner while she was loading molasses from lighters moored alongside.

The *Grenadier* bore down upon the anchored *Fair Hope* until the stevedores yelled and took to the water like bullfrogs on the edge of a pond. Then the steamer sheered off. Her wash set the small boats to pounding and plunging along the schooner's side. Lashings snapped like packthread. Casks of molasses ran wild in the boats and on the decks and in the hold of the schooner. One, bringing up against the foremast, collapsed and sent its sticky contents in leisurely course across the deck.

Mr. Carey, wearing his broad grin, was poised in the wing of the steamer's bridge. He hurled something down at the schooner. The missile burst like a bomb on the main deck. It was a potted geranium.

"There's a starter for you," the mate of the *Grenadier* yelled.

Captain Tolliver, looking down, smiled blandly and brushed imaginary bits of dust off his sleeve.

The *Grenadier* moved on out to sea. Captain Rob Hall gazed at the mess on his deck. Slowly he picked up the geranium.

"It's distressing the way Captain Tolliver keeps me in this trade," he said mildly, as he scooped up the dirt out of the broken pot. "I'll just run ashore now to ask the agent where we're apt to meet the *Grenadier* next."

"Whatever your temptation, dinna give away your intentions," MacCready said almost piously. "This John Belden o' St. Thomas, who owns the *Grenadier,* is the friend of every brass button from the governor-generals to the black cops. If with malice aforethought ye touch his shipmaster, there'll be plenty of grief."

"Maybe there'll be enough grief for both of us," Rob answered. "I'll not swerve one inch from my own course; but if Tolliver crosses my hawse—"

THROUGH that drenched, suffocating Summer the *Fair Hope* carried on. Rob forced her more by will-power than by wind from port to port, taking what freight the *Grenadier* and the big ship lines left. The *Grenadier* was elusive, although they sighted her on passage several times.

The hurricane season waned. Mr. MacCready labored indomitably but unsuccessfully upon the antiquated motor. Then, one day, over the dilapidated radio set, came a terse warning. A hurricane, born in the warm, sullen waters south of the Cape Verdes, was moving with relentless malevolence toward the islands.

Hall had already been made uneasy by a day of extraordinary clearness. He was working among the Virgin group, east of Porto Rico, with his interest in life sharpened by the fact that the *Grenadier* was due at St. Thomas for her regular overhaul under the keen eye of her owner and former commander, John Belden, retired.

But the curt announcement over the radio and the unusual visibility of the day drove the plump image of Captain Tolliver out of Rob Hall's mind. Every landmark stood out with a weird clarity, as if the sharpness of his eyes had doubled.

With all the brilliance of the day there came to the *Fair Hope's* skipper no corresponding lift of spirits. Oppression had dropped down on the schooner like a tangible weight. Even Doug MacCready grumbled to himself as he tinkered with a new carbureter in the shade of the mainsail.

"Hell's brewing," Hall declared. "The mercury's acting all set to blow the top off the barometer. This is no Tolliver hurricane. It's a real destroyer."

"Maybe it will make this old bucket move," Doug MacCready muttered. "It doesn't seem as if anything else would."

"The motor won't, anyhow," the skipper said pointedly.

"If I, wi' my experience and nationality, can't repair this engine ye'll realize what a job it is," MacCready answered. "For many a long year there's been no regular overhaul for this craft, wi' an owner like this Belden stabbing his eyes like needles into every phase o' the job, since the skipper's not up to overseeing it right."

Rob Hall did not answer, lest his retort be as sultry as the weather; and his ruffled mate was moved to mollify his resentment.

"Gi' me time, Rob; no doubt I desairve time, thinkin' myself an engineer. Phew! 'Tis muggy!"

With another glance at the sky, still utterly blue, Rob gave to the helmsman the word that sent the *Fair Hope,* with the languid wind abeam, plowing sluggishly toward the harbor of St. Thomas. Rob had collected half a cargo in odd bits at Tortola and St. John.

All that night the *Fair Hope* crawled on. The wind, in the north, was rising. The stars, despite the brilliance of the day, showed only faintly through high feathery clouds. Then they faded out.

Hall, with his hands impatiently turning the dials of his set, found his way among orchestras, crooners and advertising to reports of the advance of the storm center. The news confirmed his own observations. The wind still in the north meant, by all meteorological dope, that the center lay east or a little south of east.

As if awakened to action by the same ominous unease that beset the men, the schooner heeled to the beam wind and picked up her skirt of foam.

"Alive at last!" Rob said bitterly.

From dusk to dawn Rob stood on the tiny quarterdeck, driving her toward the mountain-sheltered refuge of St. Thomas harbor. He kept his three blacks sweating her halyards taut and trimmed her sheets himself, paying out

an inch on the jib and taking in two on the fore with unceasing patience. He kept her balanced, with rudder amidships.

But it looked like a losing race as the hours flew past.

At dawn the *Fair Hope* rounded Packet Rock. Dark, scurrying clouds raced in tatters overhead. Against a breeze that had already stiffened to half a gale she began beating up toward the mouth of St. Thomas's bowl-like bay. It was a long hard beat. Though she stood up stoutly to the breeze, her high freeboard caused her to make much leeway. Inch by inch the *Fair Hope* fought her way through the harbor headlands.

"If the hurricane doesn't shift its course, we'll get a north wind running up to a hundred or a hundred and fifty miles an hour, a flat calm when the center passes over, and then a south wind stiffer than the north," Rob shouted to MacCready.

The mate nodded.

"And if the center shifts, we'll get wind out o' God knows what quarter and shifting all around the card," he predicted gloomily. "There's a wee bit to be said for Tolliver's idea of dragging her up and planting geraniums in her."

"Not yet," Rob Hall retorted. "Not yet."

STUBBORNLY the *Fair Hope* butted her way against the small seas running out of the harbor. The hurricane signals on Cowell's Battery snapped a warning to make haste. Rob relinquished the wheel to the most stout hearted of the black hands, but MacCready pushed the quaking boy aside and took it himself.

"We'll carry our canvas," Rob said. "No sense in reefing this craft. Speed's our only chance."

Hall dived below for a look at the chart. He knew a narrow inlet where he could stow the little schooner. Moored bow and stern, no wind and nothing short of a tidal wave could stir her.

As he stared at the chart the shrill note of the wind in the shrouds and halyards rose almost to a shriek. He felt the schooner reel with the shock of that gust as she had never reeled before. Slowly she came up again. Despite the towering barrier of Signal Hill, fifteen hundred feet high, the wind was getting almost beyond the *Fair Hope's* ability to carry on.

He hurried up on deck. Doug MacCready, lips compressed and knuckles white as they gripped the wheel, was staring intently up at the ragged clouds sweeping over the harbor. The wind had shifted. It was in the northeast now.

"Is that a pilot?" MacCready shouted.

Hall's eyes, dropping from the ragged sky, focused suddenly upon a small outboard motorboat bouncing crazily over the choppy, erratic seas of the bay. There was one man aboard, swaying on his feet in the stern of the boat, eyes fixed stubbornly on the harbor heads.

Rob shook his head.

"Not the pilot boat. And pilots don't buck hurricanes down here. Suicide. He's looking beyond us."

Though his light craft behaved well, the wind and sea were rising too fast now to give the lone voyager a chance. A curling crest leaped up from nowhere and swirled over the gunwale of the boat. The craft lost way. The man bent over the engine in a frantic effort to get it started again.

"I'll take her," said Rob, reaching for the wheel. "One more like that will sink that blasted fool. Stand by with a line, Doug."

The *Fair Hope,* moving like a cup defender, stood on a long slant away from the foundering motorboat, then filled on the other tack and approached it. The man in her, stocky, blue-coated, elderly, with a sopping cigar still clenched between his teeth, had quit work on the motor. Wave after wave slopped water over the side.

The man stood in the stern, motionless as the seas would permit, staring to southward. Suddenly she sank under him. He floundered in the sea.

Though he had handled his boat well, the old one made rough weather of it now. His swimming was vigorous but unskilful. Time after time he sank, but always came thrashing to the surface again. He had just enough energy to grab at the rope end which MacCready sent whizzing past his ear.

Rob, who had his three men standing by the sheets, turned the schooner into the wind. He held her there with sails thundering. In another instant MacCready had hauled the old man over the rail. He collapsed on deck, gasping and choking. Then he clambered to his feet, pointed down the harbor and did a tottering dance of fury on the deck. His eyes were wild with grief.

"To eastward!" he gasped. "It's hauling to eastward! And look—where that tarnation dolt is taking her! Watching—waiting—and now I can't— He'll be on Trinket Knoll with that gale on her bow. She's no cargo in her to— My God, he's hit! Hit! I couldn't make it!"

He collapsed again as the wind rose to a shriek.

Turning, free at last from their rescue work, Hall and MacCready stared back toward the harbor mouth. There was, as this emphatic stranger had said, a ship on Trinket Knoll, a long two cables astern. It was the *Grenadier*.

The high bow of the little cargo ship, empty as she struggled to port for her overhauling, had literally been blown on to the reef by the violence of the swift, veering wind.

Tolliver had realized too late how the wind was shifting from dead ahead to the starboard bow. And the weight of that wind, with the ship's foul bottom working against his efforts at control, had been enough to slap his stem into the outer fringes of the Knoll.

The propeller of the *Grenadier* sent a flurry of white water rushing along her sides. Tolliver was reversing his engines. It did him no good. That howling gale, almost as solid as flying water, was pinning him against the reef with irresistible power. More wind to come!

"Maybe we can get some of 'em off before the hurricane hits!" Rob yelled. He eased over the tiller. "Once the wind whips around to southward the seas through the entrance will pound her to scrap!"

MacCready glanced seaward and jerked his head in assent. He lifted the grizzled, gasping stranger, pushed him down the companion and pulled the slide above him. Rob Hall, in grim silence, got the schooner around.

FOR minutes, as the *Fair Hope* scudded down the harbor, the gale came roaring on out of the northeast. It was not shifting now.

One of the foremast hands, after another terror-stricken glance at the livid, shredded sky, dived through the scuttle into the tiny forecastle. That change of course had taken the heart out of him. Of the two remaining, one clung to the rings on the foremast, gray of face, hardly able to move. The other, the big Barbadian, flung his bare black arms up at the threatening sky in a frenzy of derision not far from hysteria.

"Come and get me, hur'cane!" he screamed. "Schooner start movin' at las'! Whee! Boy! She move!"

Hall laughed exultantly as he felt his surging craft respond restively to the spoking of the wheel.

"That's how I feel!" he roared. "Give her more sheet, Mac! Watch her step!"

The *Fair Hope* lunged on with the wind on her quarter. The dirty, heavy canvas was swollen into graceful curves by the solid thrust of the gale. Rob felt power. Irresistible force was surging in the ship. He stared at the stricken freighter.

"Just a touch of sternway would get her off!" he yelled to MacCready. "Her old engine can't do it. Maybe we could. There's momentum behind this old

hooker today! Show 'em a rope, Mac!"

The red headed Scotsman stared hard into the glittering eyes of his skipper, but he obeyed. He clung to the stays of the foremast and brandished the rope end toward the bridge of the *Grenadier*. Somebody waved a hand. A minute later there was a scurry of activity in the stern of the freighter. Carey, the *Grenadier's* mate, was at her rail, hastily coiling a heaving line. Two blacks were dragging a hawser aft in fumbling confusion.

Rob's gaunt face was tense as the *Fair Hope* foamed alongside the *Grenadier*. He held her so close that the main boom seemed about to scrape her plates. Tolliver, his plump face white and twisted, peered down at them as they shot past the bridge. Both his hands gripped the rail. His mouth was working.

Carey flung his heaving line. The wind hurled it back in his face.

Hall turned his wheel to port. The *Fair Hope* reeled into the wind. Her canvas boomed like thunder and tore at the lashings. But Rob held her in stays, head to wind. She hung under the stern of the freighter.

Carey cast his heaving line again. This time MacCready caught it. He rushed to the stern of the schooner. The big black was at his heels. They hauled the hawser down over the stern of the steamship.

The schooner was already drifting rapidly to leeward. MacCready and the powerful negro were hard put to get the splice over the bitt on the quarter of the *Fair Hope*. Hall, deserting the wheel, backed the jib in time to prevent the schooner from surging ahead before the hawser was secured. They managed it at last. Hall, leaping back to the wheel, found that their dripping passenger had crawled out of the cabin and taken over the helm. His fingers seemed to belong on those spokes.

"Let her pay off—easy—port tack!" Hall shouted to him above the whine of the wind.

The old stranger echoed the command briskly. Hall was helping her around, backing the jib again. The schooner swung slowly. With a final crash of tackle, the wind filled her sails. She surged ahead, with Hall and MacCready easing the sheets, and the rope trailing astern.

On the *Grenadier* Tolliver still clung to the bridge rail. He was shouting commands now that the gale instantly swept away. Suddenly he abandoned the bridge to rush aft.

Carey threw a turn of the line around the capstan and gradually took a strain on it as the schooner dragged it away. Then he threw another turn around and let it tighten.

The *Fair Hope*, lunging through the water, felt too suddenly the drag of the stranded freighter. She recoiled under the shock; her timbers moaned; the wind snarled through her rigging. The tow rope leaped, dripping, out of the water.

And then a heavier gust hit her, a sudden jump in the velocity of the gale. It was like the force of an avalanche. Her mainsail ripped from boom to gaff, then thrashed itself into ribbons.

For an instant longer the foresail stood the strain; then it, too, tore into tatters.

"She got off!" MacCready yelled, grabbing at Hall's arm and stabbing astern with his hand. "She's off—making sternway."

The *Grenadier's* bow was indeed free of the rocks.

The steamer was backing away from the reef. Her rudder was hard over to swing her stern toward the deep water. Foot by foot she was creeping backward into the channel. The wind blew, then. It hit steamer and schooner with a violence like the rush of falling water. The hurricane in all its force was on them!

The strain was off the tow rope. It lay slack in the water. But the schooner's jib still held. The triangle of canvas and the flogging tatters of the other sails sent her ahead once more.

The negro hand of the *Fair Hope* was striving to cast off the hawser. Rob

Hall's body, bunched into a hurtling mass, knocked him aside before he could lift the noose off the bitt.

"We've got to hang on to the line!" Hall roared to MacCready. "The steamer's got to tow us. We've no canvas left!"

But even as he spoke the line slackened. With a curse he stared through the flying spindrift at the *Grenadier.* Tolliver's head showed on the afterdeck. He waved a hand wildly toward the schooner and then let go the steamer's end of the line.

Though only a blunder, it was a death sentence for the *Fair Hope.* The rope dropped inexorably into the sea. The steamer, with her power, had a good chance. It was too late to moor her, but she headed seaward, to ride it out.

THE schooner, her canvas gone save for the little jib, was adrift in the maw of the terrible wind. The gale swept her inexorably to leeward. And to leeward were the rocks. They caught a glimpse of Tolliver, on the afterdeck, motionless, transfixed, his eyes bulging as he stared at their tattered sails.

"Brainless fool!" thundered the gray headed man at the wheel. "Blast him! Too busy fumbling to see our bare poles!"

MacCready glanced toward the anchors forward.

"They'd keep us alive two minutes longer," he shouted.

Hall shook his head. He took over the wheel from the red faced old man.

"I'll sail her to the graveyard myself," he said. "Be damned to drifting and dragging! She'll sail downwind in a hurricane!"

He stared toward the rocks on which the harbor seas, small though they were, were breaking in high bursts of foam.

Rob eased the wheel over a spoke or two, and the jib filled again. The wind was not straight across the channel; there was still a bit of north in the direction of the gale.

"Solid this ship is, mister," Hall said to the grizzled stranger with some bitterness. "Solid as Tolliver's head! Watch!"

"Another ten days and the motor'd be running fine!" MacCready groaned.

Under the urge of that bit of sail and the swift leaping fury of the wind the *Fair Hope* picked up speed. But her speed was taking her toward the rocks.

"Cast off that hawser!" Hall commanded.

The Scotsman silently obeyed. The rope was delaying their diagonal rush toward the iron coast. But if the skipper desired to hurry the crash, MacCready was still taking his orders. With way on the schooner, Rob Hall still had a little control.

"There's a reef between us and Sand Cove, if that's what you hope to make," shouted the old man at Hall's shoulder. "By heaven, I'd like to make shore just to wipe Tolliver's eye! I knew he'd fail in a jam!"

For an instant Hall took his gaze off the fringe of leaping white water that marked the reef ahead. The older man stood square on his legs and stared ahead unflinchingly.

"Built stoutly enough to stand ice," rasped the *Fair Hope's* skipper. "We'll see what she does against rocks."

With a taut face he swung the wheel sharply. The schooner answered by lunging three points off the wind. She thrust her bow toward where the frothing teeth of the reef showed a narrow gap of less agitated water. It was far too narrow for the *Fair Hope's* beam. She flew at it under the drive of that merciless, shrieking gale.

There was a smash. Rocks to port and starboard ground on the strakes of the schooner. She stopped dead, shuddering. The shock threw every man on her sprawling.

But Hall, flung against the wheel, clutched at the spokes as if they had some power to keep her timbers from flying apart under that double blow.

A wave astern lifted her up, and the

fury of the wind hurled her on. The men waited with grinding teeth for the end. But the *Fair Hope,* plunging again, touched only water. Despite that terrific crash she still held together.

"There's sand," the old stranger shouted.

Hall nodded tersely. The schooner had been flung over the reef into a narrow cove. The hurricane was still driving her on across the quieter waters. In another instant she struck a sandbar with a grating rasp. She slipped on and over it. On she lunged, then ground sullenly to a halt fifty feet farther on. Her bow rose high, as if on the shoulders of a mountainous sea. But it never fell again.

With a yell the terrified tan boy from Guadeloupe let go the foremast and flung himself up on the bowsprit. He dropped over into six inches of water. In another instant he was flinging himself face down on dry land.

The three white men aft looked at one another. They were safe, but there didn't seem to be much to say.

"It took a hurricane to start her, but the rocks and sandbar couldn't stop her," Hall muttered at last. He peered over the side. "Only dynamite would move her off now. But she sailed!"

The old man sat down on her rail, heedless of the wind that even in this cove beat upon them with venomous force.

"I'm Belden—owner o' the *Grenadier,*" he shouted to Rob Hall. "I put out moorings before dawn that would ha' held a liner, and I watched for her on the hill. I had it roweling my mind that that Tolliver slug was no man to bring her in an' maneuver her. If I'd got to her— Well, I owe you some salvage money. Damned if I can pay it!"

"I know how it is," Rob shouted back. "I was a shipowner myself."

"Will you take a share in the *Grenadier* and command her for me?" Belden roared. "Bring your mate with you. Those two tailors are out."

Rob looked down at the gaping deck of the broken *Fair Hope.* He nodded.

"I'll take you," he shouted, with quick gratitude. "If Tolliver wants another command I'll give him this one. It's all set to plant geraniums in!"

"Aye!" roared MacCready. "And we have a geranium in a wee pot below to give him a start."

HEADING IT OFF

By Berton Braley

THE Modern Man has gone effete;
His heart has slowed up in its beat;
His arms are weak, his knees are rusted—
ALL OLD OLYMPIC RECORDS BUSTED!

The Modern Girl is pale and thin
From dieting and bootleg gin.
She is a lazy languid jane—
GIRL GIRDLES WORLD IN MONOPLANE!

The Race is overcivilized,
Degenerate and undersized
Since Troglodytes went forth to hunt—
SCIENCE FINDS CAVEMAN WAS A RUNT!

The STRANGER *from* BOSTON

By REECE HAGUE

JEOPARDY JACKSON was on duty in the office—a phase of police activity which held absolutely no appeal for the hard boiled sergeant. In charge of the Provincial police detachment at the Northern Manitoba frontier town of Tamarack Township, he had been nicknamed by his subordinates because he invariably undertook work of a hazardous nature himself instead of leaving it to one of his men. As he lolled back in his swivel chair, Jackson deeply inhaled the enticing aroma of moose stew which was being wafted in from the living quarters at the rear of the barracks, and his eyes sought the clock hanging on a wall opposite his desk.

He noted with satisfaction that the hands pointed to five minutes before six, which meant that in a brief three hundred seconds he would be at liberty to lock up the office and repair to the room which served as mess hall and living quarters for himself and his staff.

With tantalizing slowness the minute hand dragged its way toward the apex of the clock; and it had almost reached its destination when the door leading into the street opened.

Giving vent to a grunt of irritation such as might have emanated from a hungry grizzly restrained from keeping an urgent eating appointment, the sergeant swung around in his chair to survey the intruder who had chosen such an inopportune time for a call.

The man who entered the office was a stranger to Jackson. His frame was as large as that of the burly policeman. When he threw back his frost-rimed parka, the sergeant noted that icicles clung to a several days' growth of beard and that the unwelcome visitor's face showed unmistakable marks of strain and weariness.

"What d'you want?" Jackson inquired curtly.

"Bart Cameron's the name; and I've come to report the murder of my uncle, Ben Renton, up at Fisher Lake," the stranger said quietly.

"What's that?"

The policeman sat bolt upright in his chair, and his steely eyes bored into the tired ones of the man standing

before him.

"You heard me the first time, Sergeant."

But there was nothing offensive in Cameron's tone.

"What you bump him off for?" Jackson asked abruptly, at the same time reaching in his desk drawer for the cell keys which were reposing there.

"I didn't," Cameron responded wearily. "I found him dead and came right back to report to the authorities."

The sergeant eyed the other man suspiciously.

"Who the hell are you, anyhow?" he asked bruskly. "I've never seen you up this way before, and I never heard of old Renton having any relatives. It's a dead cinch he didn't have any enemies. He was the most harmless old codger I ever clapped eyes on. And here you come in, sayin' some one's killed him but it wasn't you. Where you from, Cameron?"

"Boston's my home town," the other man explained. "I hit this place for the first time in my life twelve days ago. Stayed one night at the Trapper's Rest, hired myself a dog team and lit out for my uncle's cabin. It took me six days to make the trip out, and when I got there I found the old man lying in a frozen pool of blood on the floor of the shack with a bullet hole through his chest. It was too late to make a start back that night, and the dogs were tired; but I left next morning. It took me only five days to get back because I didn't run into bad weather like I struck on the way out."

The sergeant nodded.

"She was sure bad last week, all right," he admitted. "You done some fast traveling for a greenhorn, Cameron. It's all of one hundred and seventy miles to Renton's place. Flop in that chair there while I ask you a few questions. But I'm warnin' you that what you say might be used against you later. I don't see who the hell would have shot Renton if it wasn't you. Everybody in the country liked the old man."

"First off, read this letter and it'll show you what brought me up here."

Producing a folded sheet of paper from his pocket, Cameron extended it to the policeman. The sergeant read:

> "Dear Nefew, a year or so back you rit me that your mother was dead but I haven't got round to answering you till now. With Jenny gone it looks like you're the only kin I got left and I want that you come up here right away. Anybody in Tamarack Township can tell you how to get to my place. If you stack up like I figger you oughta, bein the son of my sister who was a fine woman and John Cameron who was a square shooter, you won't have no cause to be sorry for comin. This Winter you can work with me on my trap line and in the Spring if you've showed me your the sort of guy I hope I'll show you somethin real good that nobody but me in this country knows about. Come right soon and I'll be lookin for you. Your affecshunate uncle—Ben Renton."

Having completed his perusal of the letter, Sergeant Jackson remarked:

"Well, that seems clear enough. It wouldn't 'a' been worthwhile you lyin' about when you come up here. I can check up too easy. If you did get up to Fisher Lake, bump off your uncle and get back here in eleven days, you didn't waste no time killin' him after you landed there. What's this 'somethin' real good' he was goin' to show you in the Spring?"

Cameron shook his head hopelessly.

"How would I know?" he inquired. "I tell you I never saw the old man alive. When we go through his things in the cabin we might find some clew."

"You didn't look through his things when you were there?"

"I touched nothing except the body to make absolutely sure he was dead; although that was hardly necessary, seeing he was frozen stiff. But I had a good look around, so if anything has been touched before we get back I'll know."

"Was there any fur in the cabin?" came the sergeant's next question.

"A small pile in one corner and half a dozen pelts on stretchers."

"There wouldn't be much yet," the

sergeant elucidated. "The trapping season only started a short while back. No; the old man wasn't killed for his furs. Did he keep his money in the shack?"

"I haven't any notion," Cameron replied. "We'd better see the bank where he did his business. They'd know about his habits."

"I'll get the banker right now. It's only right some one else ought to have their meal hour broke up." The sergeant's tone suddenly took on a note of cheerfulness.

AFTER a brief telephone conversation the policeman again turned to Cameron.

"The old man had quite a sizable bank account," he said. "But the banker maintains it ain't likely he'd have money in his shack. Every Spring he come in with his furs, sold 'em, used what money he needed for supplies and put the rest in the bank. Then he'd come down again in the Fall, draw out enough for his Winter's grub and head back to Fisher Lake."

For a matter of seconds there was silence while the sergeant studied the other man closely. At length he said thoughtfully:

"You don't look like a killer to me, Cameron; but a lot of murderers don't. If you didn't do old Renton in, who else could have? It looks like you had a real good motive, too. If you're his only kin, you fall heir to his bankroll; and if you found out what this good thing was that Renton was goin' to show you in the Spring right soon after you joined him, it might've been an added incentive to put him out of the way. He put in the Summers prospecting around his cabin; and it's on the boards he might have run across a gold mine or somethin' of the sort. The country's well mineralized up Fisher Lake way."

"Supposing my uncle had located a mine," interposed Cameron, "isn't it possible some one else besides myself might have found out about it and done away with him?"

"All things is possible," the sergeant remarked pedantically, "but that ain't no ways probable. The country where Renton hung out is mighty thinly populated."

"There must be other trappers and prospectors in the district," Cameron persisted.

"I only know of two within a hundred miles of Renton's cabin, and they are about sixteen miles farther along the lake. There ain't even any Indian settlements around that way; and what stray Indians might drift up there are real peaceable. No, Cameron, it looks to me like you're the only prospect, and I guess I'd better lock you up while I go up to Fisher Lake, have a look round and bring in old Renton's body."

"Look here, Sergeant—" the American's voice was urgent—"what about taking me up to Fisher Lake with you? You could take an extra man along if you thought I was liable to cut up rough. I want to look over that cabin again. I've a hunch that if you take me with you I can find something that'll point to my uncle's murderers. You mightn't believe it, but I'm just as keen on seeing some one strung up for this killing as you are."

Jackson leaned forward and subjected Cameron to a close scrutiny before replying. When he did speak he gave the impression of considering each word carefully.

"Cameron," he said, "there's something blasted funny about this whole business. Everythin' points to you as the most likely murderer of Ben Renton; and your chasin' in here with a story about findin' him dead don't make me any the less suspicious. But I know I got nothin' definite on you yet and I'm goin' to take you up on that proposition about comin' up to Fisher Lake with me. I never been accused of not givin' a man a square deal yet.

"Bright and early tomorrow mornin' we start out, and I'm not takin' any extra man either. They're needed down

here. But I'll be heeled and you won't; and if you try to start anythin', I'm warnin' you right now you'll be on the receivin' end of a sizable hunk of lead. I'll tell the boys to find out what they can about you from Boston while I'm away. Any one down there who knows you real well you'd suggest we get in touch with? I don't mind hearin' what your friends got to say about you; but I'll extend my inquiries a bit further than that."

"You might ask the district attorney in Boston for my record," Cameron suggested, a shadow of a smile flitting across his face. "He knows me and I hope he won't say anything too bad about me."

Sergeant Jackson grunted.

"I'll just do that little thing," he assured the other man. "The dope on you will be here when we get back. And now we might as well go in and see if the boys have left any of that mulligan. You ain't exactly under arrest, Cameron; but you sure are under suspicion. I won't lock you up tonight; but I sort of hanker after your company, so I'll put you up in a spare bed we got in the barracks."

ON THE journey from Tamarack Township to Fisher Lake, Bart Cameron found the sergeant a not unpleasant traveling companion. The policeman, while still harboring a strong suspicion that the American was guilty of Ben Renton's murder, treated him as he would have treated any other man with whom he had found himself on the trail, save that, realizing Cameron had done a lot of heavy traveling for a man unused to the North, the sergeant unostentatiously took upon himself the brunt of the trail breaking.

When, early in the afternoon of their sixth day out, they neared the Renton cabin, Jackson asked suddenly—

"What happened to Renton's huskies, Cameron?"

"Didn't see any trace of them," the American responded. "I guess whoever killed him either did away with the dogs too, or took them with him."

"Men in this country don't go runnin' around with dogs belonging to some one they've killed," the sergeant objected. "It'd be a dead giveaway, because every one knows every one else's huskies. Renton's dogs were either killed or let off their chains so they could run loose. They'd probably hang around the cabin for a day or so. Then when no grub showed up, they'd revert back to the wolf strain and go off hunting game."

Snow had fallen while the men were traveling, and the trail Cameron had broken from the lake shore to the cabin on his previous visit was freshly covered over. The dogs unhitched, the sergeant and his companion were approaching the door of the shack when the latter suddenly grasped the policeman's arm and, pointing downward, said excitedly—

"What do you make of that, Sergeant?"

Looking at the spot indicated, Jackson saw the faint imprint of a moccasin clad foot not entirely obliterated by the recent snowfall.

"That's been made since I left here," Cameron ejaculated.

"It was made just before the last snowfall finished; when we were fifty-odd miles away," the sergeant agreed.

Stopping again just outside the door, Cameron remarked:

"There was quite a pile of snow here when I came up first. I scuffed some of it away, and on the hard packed trail underneath there's a big bloodstain. Shall I clear this new snow away so you can see it?"

The sergeant nodded and, while the American was so engaged, looked around and saw the trace of another footprint.

"Some one's been here all right," he said casually. "Probably a stray Indian lookin' for a handout. I bet he beat it hell bent for election when he saw Ben Renton's corpse."

But Cameron, bending down to gaze at the spot he had cleared of fresh snow, hardly heard the policeman's remark.

In bewilderment he stared at the patch in front of him until Jackson, coming up beside him, inquired—

"Well, where's this bloodstain you were talking about?"

"That's where it was—" Cameron indicated the cleared space—"but some one's chopped it away."

Skepticism was apparent in the sergeant's manner as he leaned down to inspect the spot at which Cameron was pointing. But this gave way to perplexity when he realized that, just as the other man said, some one had hacked away a portion of the packed trail which had been made by Ben Renton's feet on his journeys to and from the cabin before death overtook him.

"They overlooked a few small spots, though." Cameron designated some tiny, sinister-appearing blotches on the icy crust a few inches from the place where it had been gouged away.

"This is a damn queer business, all right," the sergeant muttered.

"It's all of that," Cameron agreed as he straightened up from his stooping posture. Indicating a small hole in the rough wood of the door immediately in front of them, the American added, "I figger you'll find the bullet that killed my uncle in there, Sergeant. It's just about breast high on an average man like Ben Renton. His murderer must have been lying in wait for him among those trees there and shot him just after he came out and shut the door behind him."

"Well, let's go into the cabin," Jackson said noncommittally and, throwing open the door, strode into the one-room structure.

The rigidly frozen body of Ben Renton, which the policeman expected to see lying on the whipsawn floor, was nowhere in sight. Turning to Cameron, who had followed him, Jackson demanded belligerently—

"Now where in hell is this body you brought me up to see?"

Cameron, his brows knit and astonishment in his expression, stood gazing down at the floor and made no response until the sergeant, whose voice had grown dangerously quiet, continued:

"What does this mean, Cameron? Are you crazy as a bedbug, and has this yarn you've been telling me been eyewash from beginning to end? If it has you'll pay for it, my lad. I'm not a man to be spoofed, as you'll damned soon find out. Why, there's not even a bloodstain on this floor, and you told me it was covered with gore."

The American shook his head as though to clear it of befogging clouds and dropped on one knee to the boards. After a minute of intensive examination he responded calmly:

"You can still see traces of the bloodstains if you look hard enough, Sergeant, although the floor's been scrubbed and some one's tried mighty hard to obliterate them."

"You're right at that," Jackson agreed grudgingly after a close scrutiny of the floor. "There's something I don't understand here. What do you make of it, Cameron?"

"I'd say the chaps who did the killing came back and took the body," Cameron said thoughtfully. "They probably thought it would be a lot safer for them if Uncle Ben just disappeared than it would be if some one drifted in here and found his body with a bullet hole through it."

The sergeant's tone was dangerous.

"Cameron," he said, "it looks to me like you killed the old man, got rid of the body and then trumped up this story about having found him dead. It don't make sense; but what the hell else is a man to think?"

"What about those footprints?" Cameron asked patiently.

"Probably a stray Indian, as I said at first," Jackson rejoined.

"Somebody's been over this cabin since I was here," Cameron said positively. "The stove's been lit, or at any rate that pile of wood in the corner is smaller than it was. That kettle was on the stove before, and now it's standing on

the table. I guess the stove was lighted to heat water to scrub out the bloodstains."

As he talked, the American was walking around the cabin.

"That packsack's been shifted," he continued, "and the contents taken out. It was packed flat before; now it's bulging as though the contents were shoved in any old way. That bunch of rock on the floor was piled up and now it's spread out; another piece of rock that was on the little shelf by the lamp is missing."

"What sort of rock?" the sergeant demanded with sudden interest.

"Whitish stuff with sort of dark streaks. I don't know much about rocks," Cameron admitted a shade apologetically.

"Sounds like ribbon quartz," Jackson interposed. "No other pieces like it among this bunch here?" He indicated the ore samples in the corner.

Cameron shook his head.

"Some of this stuff's mineralized," remarked the sergeant, who had walked over to investigate the pieces of rock. "Just a typical bunch of prospector's samples. But the ribbon quartz sounds interesting. It often carries heavy in gold up this way."

"What about looking through my uncle's effects and seeing if there's any reference to this big thing he mentioned in the letter?" Cameron inquired. "I don't expect to find anything, seeing some one's been over the place; but there's no harm in looking."

"Not a bit," agreed the sergeant.

But, although the men ransacked the cabin thoroughly, nothing of an enlightening nature was revealed. The search concluded, Cameron asked the policeman if he intended to dig the bullet out of the door.

"I may as well," responded Jackson, removing a formidable jack-knife from his pocket and strolling out of the cabin.

A minute later the sergeant returned.

"There it is!" he remarked, and extended a hand in the palm of which lay a slightly misshapen lead projectile. "Looks like a bullet from a .22 high power. You're so damn anxious I shouldn't overlook it, I'm betting that if it came from your gun you've planted that gun where it ain't likely to appear as evidence against you."

DARKNESS was setting in and, after lighting the coal oil lamp which had served the previous occupant for illumination, the sergeant sank down on Ben Renton's bunk and motioned Cameron to the only chair which the cabin boasted. When the latter was seated the policeman said gruffly:

"Cameron, this affair has me guessing. I'm satisfied Renton is dead, all right; but if you killed him, you're acting different to any murderer I ever had dealin's with. And in any case, where in hell's the body? You may be right about some one havin' been here collectin' the corpse and trying to erase the bloodstains; and the footprints kind of bear out your theory. But then again they might have belonged to an innocent man who just dropped in here casual-like. If you did kill him, planted the body and then come runnin' down to me with a cock-and-bull story, I can't make out what your game was. I'm a long way from bein' convinced you don't know a lot more about this affair than you're lettin' on."

"I can't say I altogether blame you for clinging to the notion that I killed my uncle," Cameron told the sergeant. "If I was in your place, I'd feel mighty like you do. But I've no intention of being strung up for a crime I never committed. Supposing for the sake of argument some one else was in here recently and moved the body, what would he be likely to do with it?"

"Well, it's a cinch he couldn't bury it with the ground frozen the way it is," Jackson replied shortly.

"That's what I thought," Cameron acknowledged. "The way this business looks to me is that my uncle was killed a short while before I got here. The man

who shot him saw him crawl into the shack and, knowing that the chances were a hundred to one against any one happening up this way during the Winter, decided to let matters rest for awhile. Then, a day or so ago he came back to make sure the old man was dead and, figgering it might save trouble in the long run, tried to obliterate the blood-stains and moved the body. What do you think he'd do with it?"

"He wouldn't be liable to pack it home with him," the sergeant responded.

"In fact, he wouldn't be likely to take it very far, I should think," Cameron resumed. "I suppose if he left it in the bush there would be a chance of the wolves cleaning up on it before Spring. If not, he could be on hand bright and early after open water, weight it down and throw it in the lake. Then, I suppose, when Uncle Ben didn't put in an appearance in Tamarack Township about the usual time, every one would think it was just another case of a man disappearing in the North. I judge such cases aren't altogether unknown."

"They're a damn sight too common," the sergeant declared, "what with a bunch of greenhorns coming up every Winter and going out to make their fortunes at trapping. We spend a lot of time every Summer hunting around for birds who've got 'emselves mislaid. Sometimes we find 'em and sometimes we don't. The old-timers have a way of passing out sudden-like, too. If Ben Renton hadn't turned up with his fur catch next Spring, me or one of my men would have taken a run up here to see what had happened. Finding the shack deserted, we would have hunted around for him.

"But a lot of things can happen to a man livin' alone in this country. He can get caught in a blizzard and freeze to death. He can take scurvy from not eating enough green stuff and die trying to reach help. He can cut himself with his ax or shoot himself accidentally when on the trail and bleed to death. He can get caught in one of his own traps, although that ain't likely with an experienced man. He can run foul of a pack of wolves. Or his own dogs can turn on him and chew him up, then beat it, work themselves loose of their harness and live off the country like their wolf ancestors did. The body, or what's left of it, might be found; but the chances are against it."

"Until you've found Renton's body you can't do a damn thing, can you?" the American asked.

The sergeant smiled grimly.

"I can take you back and throw you in the can, then send a couple of the boys up here to make a real close search," he informed his companion.

"You'd have a sweet scented time trying to convict me the way things stand," Cameron retorted. Then he added good-naturedly, "Before you do anything drastic, why not start in combing the country around the cabin for the body?"

"Matter of fact, that's what I intend doing," the policeman assured him.

"By the way—" the American's tone was intensely sober now—"what sort of men are these two trappers who live farther along the lake?"

"Joe Marvin and Blackie Gratz?" The sergeant reflected for a moment before saying noncommittally, "They've never caused me any trouble. Marvin's been up this way quite awhile; but Gratz only joined him a year back."

Cameron relapsed into silence, and the sergeant busied himself with his own thoughts for a time before rising to his feet and saying:

"We might as well go out and feed the dogs, come back and feed ourselves and then turn in for the night. You can use this bunk, and I'll curl up in my robe alongside the stove."

Jackson watched narrowly to see if the other man evinced any sign of repugnance at the thought of sleeping in the dead man's bed. But Cameron merely nodded absent-mindedly, so the sergeant continued:

"I'm not looking for you to try and pull anything, Cameron; but if you do,

you'll be making a hell of a mistake and it'll be your body instead of your uncle's I'll be packing out on the carriole. The old man's artillery standing in the corner there is unloaded; this sixshooter of mine is loaded, and I'm sleeping with it inside my robe. Until I find out a bit more about what happened up this way, I'm still lookin' on you as possible gallow's bait."

"I hope you'll find out more before tomorrow night," Cameron ventured, and together the two men went out to feed the hungry huskies.

AT DAYBREAK the sergeant and the American were abroad searching the bush in the neighborhood of the cabin for traces of the missing body; but the carpet of snow hid any secrets which might lie beneath it. Walking down toward the lake shore, they discovered more indistinct traces of footprints; and when they reached the lake itself the sergeant, trudging to and fro on the snow covered surface, suddenly halted.

"Feels like the crust underneath this new fall's been packed down," he remarked. "I'd judge a carriole'd traveled along here awhile back. I'll harness up the dogs and we'll see if we can't follow the trail a ways. If there's a packed trail underneath, they'll stick to it a damn sight easier than we could. It might be a trail old Renton used goin' down the lake to visit his traps, but we'll follow it anyhow."

For a mile the huskies, with the two men close behind, followed what was undoubtedly a trail lying along the lake close to the shore.

Then Cameron, whose eyes had been glued to the bush on the shoreline, suddenly exclaimed:

"Pull up a minute, will you, Sergeant? Look among the trees there. Doesn't it appear to you that something has been plowing around in the deep snow?"

"You're dead right it does," Jackson replied. "Come along and we'll see what it means."

Something or some one had undoubtedly penetrated into the bush at the point where the snow was disturbed. Less than a hundred yards from the shore, hidden among the thick growth of stunted jackpine, the sergeant almost stumbled over Ben Renton's body, lying face upward and loosely covered with snow.

Cameron uncovered his head momentarily when he gazed down at the still face frozen into a placid mask; and Sergeant Jackson, who was watching him closely, saw an expression of sorrow steal over the American's strong countenance.

"Poor old beggar," Ben Renton's nephew murmured. "I'd like to have seen you alive; but I'll take care you get a proper burial, anyhow."

Turning to the policeman, Cameron said impulsively:

"Look here, Sergeant, I'm just as anxious to find my uncle's murderers as you are. You've treated me pretty white up to now. I've got a strong hunch that I can clear this business up if you'll come along with me to Marvin and Gratz's shack. It lies this way from my uncle's cabin, doesn't it?"

"About fifteen miles farther along the lake," Jackson replied. "We're goin' there all right, my lad. I'm beginning to change my ideas about this affair, and it looks like a call on them two trappers is just about in order. We'll hoist poor old Ben up in a tree just in case any wolves happen along, which ain't likely, seeing they haven't located him up to date. We can collect the body on the way back."

The men traveled on in silence and shortly after dark they saw a light on the shoreline.

"That's the cabin, I suppose?" Cameron inquired.

"That's it and, seein' there's a light, at least one of the boys is home," responded the sergeant.

"Look here, Sergeant"—there was urgency in the American's voice now—"do you mind if I go into the cabin alone, and you follow along when I am

inside and listen by the door to what goes on?"

"Why in hell should I stay outside in the cold?" Jackson demanded.

But there was curiosity rather than indignation in his tone.

"Those men know you're a police officer, don't they?" Cameron asked.

"Of course, they do."

"Well, I'm a total stranger to them; and I've got an idea I can bluff a lot of information out of them they'd never give if you were along," the American explained. "But I wish you'd keep your gun handy and come a-running if any trouble starts, which isn't altogether unlikely."

"You're one of the queerest birds I've run across yet, Cameron," the sergeant declared. "But, by the Old Harry, I'm goin' to humor you. You've got something on your mind, and I'm damn interested to find out what it is. I don't think you and these other guys are in cahoots; but if you are and try to pull anything on me, I'll shoot first and ask questions afterward."

"That's O.K. with me," Cameron assured him. "But, for the Lord's sake, listen close to everything that's said inside the cabin. I'll talk loud so you won't have any trouble hearing; and I'm banking on the other men talking loud too before the session's over. If you come in shooting, for heaven's sake, pot the right men."

By this time the dogs had turned up the trail leading from the lake to the cabin.

"Go ahead," instructed the policeman. "I'll wait behind until you're inside and then come up outside the door. Hop to it, feller. If you can prove somebody else killed Ben Renton, I won't be weepin' any tears of disappointment."

ANSWERING Cameron's rap at the cabin door, a guttural voice with a slight foreign intonation inquired harshly—

"Who de hell's that?"

"A stranger up this way," the American called back, "looking for a place to flop. I saw your light and figgered you'd put me up."

"Come right in," called a second voice.

Entering the shack, Cameron saw a bearded man typical of the Northerners he had met in Tamarack Township and whom he took to be Marvin sitting at a table playing solitaire with an incredibly greasy and dog-eared deck of cards. A second man, whose ebony hair and glittering black eyes plainly pointed to the reason for his nickname, Blackie, but who for some subtle reason hardly seemed to fit into the Northern picture, lay back on a bunk gazing fixedly at the visitor.

Immediately his eyes rested on Gratz's face, something clicked in Bart Cameron's memory. With difficulty he restrained an exclamation of astonished jubilation and schooled himself to show no emotion.

The bearded man rose from the table and scrutinized the newcomer as closely as his companion was doing.

"We don't get a hell of a lot of company up this way," he stated. "But rest your rear end on something, stranger, and tell us where you blew in from."

"I'm a nephew of Ben Renton's," Cameron responded, ignoring the trapper's invitation to sit down, and noted with satisfaction that Marvin gave a start of surprise while Gratz's eyes bored into his with fierce intensity.

"So!" Marvin said after a momentary hesitation. "He's our nearest neighbor, but we ain't seen the old feller for quite awhile."

"You won't see him again," Cameron remarked. "He's been murdered."

"Vat you mean, murdered?" Gratz inquired vehemently.

"Just what I say," Cameron responded evenly.

"Did you find his body?"

Marvin's voice was tense and both he and his partner seemed to await the stranger's reply with unnatural eagerness.

Cameron nodded and said briefly—

"Yes, some one has drilled him and left his body in the bush."

"He might have shot himself," Marvin argued.

"His gun wasn't anywhere around," Cameron objected.

"Who d'you reckon could have done it?" Marvin asked.

"That's hard to say," Cameron admitted. "He wrote me awhile back about a rich find he'd made and wanted me to come up and go partners with him. Somebody else might have known about the find and put him out of the way."

"Did he tell you vere de mine vas?" Gratz inquired.

"Sure!" Cameron lied convincingly. "He described the exact location and sent me some samples. They weren't unlike that bit of rock on the table there."

"Is zat so?" There was silky menace in Gratz's voice.

"Quite a bit like it," Cameron resumed conversationally. "Seeing the old man's dead, I guess I'd better stake the property myself."

"You do, do you?" Marvin asked.

Sergeant Jackson, his ear glued to the door, detected irony in the man's tone.

"Why not?" Cameron inquired in assumed surprise.

"Somebody might have staked that prospect already," Marvin pointed out.

"Not likely," Cameron assured him. "My uncle told me there wasn't another living soul who knew anything about it."

"He might have been mistaken." Marvin's voice was dangerous now.

The American threw aside pretense.

"That's what I figgered when I found him with a bullet hole through his chest," he acknowledged. "He wasn't killed where I found him, either. There were traces of blood on the shack floor, and the bullet that got him was imbedded in the door."

"You seem to have been finding out a hell of a lot," Marvin remarked.

"Maybe too much," Gratz suggested.

"Well, I've been looking around," Cameron admitted modestly. "And you'd be surprised at just how much I have found out . . . By the way, Gratz, do you know I'm damn sure I've seen your picture somewhere—and it wasn't in any art gallery either. I've got an idea it was on one of those posters you see lying around police stations across the Line with the words '$5,000 reward', and so on, printed below it. Your name wasn't Gratz on the picture I saw. It was more like Heinrich. You're wise to stick to good German names, with an accent like yours."

The man addressed slid his hand beneath the coverings of the bunk on which he was half lying, half sitting, and when it emerged it contained a sinister, flat, black object which would have seemed more appropriate in a Chicago underworld dive than in a Northern cabin.

"You do know too much!"

The words were spoken so low that Cameron feared they would be inaudible to the sergeant listening outside; but Jackson had phenomenally acute hearing and, oblivious of the fact that Gratz was leveling an automatic at the man whom he now recognized as an ally, was crouching by the door waiting to hear a little more preparatory to making his entrance.

"If you bump me off too, there'll be a lot of inquiries made," Cameron said, stalling for time.

"What if there are?" Marvin inquired callously. "I've been doin' a bit of thinkin'. I don't know what your name is, feller, but that don't matter. You been nosin' around too much for your own good; but, at that, I'm sort of glad you showed up. There was always a chance of some one runnin' across Renton's carcass before Spring and askin' a lot of questions. Now, when my pardner has drilled you, we can pack you along to the old man's cabin, pick him up on the way and lay you both out nice and life-like, with my rifle by you and Blackie's gat handy to Renton. When Blackie and me go out in the Spring, we'll find you both there and

tell the cops in Tamarack Township how you must have passed out in some sort of a family ruckus."

Gratz nodded approval of his partner's plan.

"You alvays vas a bright feller, Joe," he complimented Marvin. "In de old days back in de Philly pen you vas de kvickest thinker ve had."

"I guess it was you who thought of taking my uncle's body out of the cabin and trying to get rid of the bloodstains?" Cameron inquired.

"Well, it looked like it might save a lot of talk," Marvin agreed, apparently gratified at his partner's flattery. "If the wolves hadn't got him by Spring, we'd have taken damn good care nobody ever saw him again."

"Tie a rock to the body and drop it in the lake, I suppose?" Cameron asked.

"What else?" inquired Marvin. Then, his voice changing into a snarl, "What the hell are you waiting for, Blackie? Shoot and get it over with."

WHILE he had been talking, Cameron's brain had been functioning at top pressure. Imperceptibly he had been edging close to the table on which stood the lamp which illuminated the cabin. No use waiting for Sergeant Jackson to come to the rescue, he told himself. From bitter experience he knew too well the accuracy and rapidity with which little weapons, such as the one with which Gratz was armed, dealt out death. It was now or never. The expression of the killer was in the German's eyes.

The automatic spoke. But a split second before the report, Cameron's left leg hooked itself around a leg of the table beneath the lamp and gave a mighty heave. In the same movement, throwing himself sidewise and forward, he launched himself at the gunman's legs.

The sergeant's precipitate entry into the suddenly darkened cabin synchronized with the crash of the table and the bark of the automatic. In one corner he heard a mighty floundering and harsh German gutturals interspersed with good American profanity. Then two more shots rang through the room.

The sergeant, feeling his way toward the struggling men, suddenly collided with a bulky form, gave a snort of delight at being in action at last and smote wildly and effectively with his reversed sixshooter at the spot where the face of the man he had encountered should be.

A frenzied curse burst from the lips of Marvin, the man whom the sergeant had struck, and the trapper launched a mighty kick at his assailant.

Jackson grunted with pain as the blow struck home. But his groping hands clutched at and grasped the trapper's throat and together they crashed to the floor, the policeman's gun hand imprisoned beneath his antagonist's body.

Notwithstanding Cameron's desperate effort to dodge, the first bullet from Gratz's automatic had buried itself in his left shoulder; but the subsequent shots had sped harmlessly toward the roof since, by the time they were fired, the gunman's right wrist was imprisoned in the powerful grip of the American's right hand.

Kneeling on the writhing form of his adversary, Cameron dug his fingers into Gratz's wrist until he felt the other man's fingers straighten out and heard the automatic clatter to the floor. Suddenly releasing his hold, but with his knee still pressed into the German's belly, Cameron picked up the gun, then rose stiffly to his feet.

But Gratz had not yet finished. Immediately the pressure on his body was released, he too scrambled to his feet and threw himself at the place where his senses told him his enemy was standing.

The gun in Cameron's hand came down with a sickening thud on Gratz's skull and, with a whimpering sigh, the gunman crumpled to the floor and lay still.

Cameron groped in his pocket for a match and by its light saw the sergeant and Marvin engaged in a Homeric strug-

gle on the other side of the cabin. While the match still burned he jumped forward and once again brought down the gun, this time on the head of the second trapper.

With another match the American located the fallen lamp.

"The chimney's all shot," he remarked to the sergeant, who had arisen and was standing beside him. "Lucky thing the place didn't burn down. Well, the lamp's not much good to us the way she is, but I saw some candles on a shelf over there."

"You don't seem to miss much, young feller," Jackson observed, and the other man favored him with a friendly grin.

When a candle was lighted the policeman noticed Cameron's bloodstained sleeve.

"Hit you, did he?"

"I've been shot up worse," the American responded carelessly. "Well, Sergeant, are you satisfied now that I didn't kill my uncle?"

"I couldn't figger you as a killer right from the jump," Jackson maintained. "But you looked like the only prospect. As a matter of fact, Cameron, I'm glad it wasn't you. I'd a hell of a lot rather see these other two guys strung up. I see Gratz is beginnin' to stir. I've got some cuffs in my pocket—thought they might come in handy for you if you cut up rough. I'll stick them on the Gratz guy. We'll have to tie up the other bird's hands. They look like a slippery pair, and I'm takin' no chances until I get 'em lodged in the hoosegow."

"Better take along that .22 high power in the rack there," suggested Cameron. "I guess the expert'll be able to match it up with that bullet that killed my uncle. I can't figure how these birds could lie themselves out of the noose, but there's no use overlooking any evidence. That bit of rock on the floor fell off the table when I upset it. It looks mighty like the piece I saw in my uncle's cabin. I'd identify it as the same piece, anyway."

"I wonder if we could bulldoze these eggs into telling you where your uncle's prospect is located?" the sergeant remarked speculatively. "If it's right handy, we could stay on a day while you staked it."

"I don't give a damn where the mine is," Cameron assured the policeman. "I'm no blasted miner; and I didn't intend to stay up here, anyway. Just thought I'd put in my vacation paying the old man a visit. I guess I'll have to remain in Tamarack Township until these guys—"indicating the still recumbent forms of Gratz and Marvin—"are dealt with. There'll be Uncle Ben's estate to wind up too. I guess I'll come into his cash. Money's always handy, but I'd a sight sooner have seen the poor old fellow alive.

"By the way," he added, as if an afterthought, "if you want fingerprints just to make an open and shut case, I'm betting you'd find a lot of them in the old man's cabin—on the kettle they heated the water in when they tried to wash out the bloodstains, for instance."

"Cameron, my boy, you ought to have been a detective," the sergeant said admiringly.

A slow smile spread over the American's face.

"When you get the Boston district attorney's report back in Tamarack Township, you'll find that's what I have been ever since they transferred me from the uniform squad a couple of years back," he rejoined. "And that's the job I'm going back to. It's a whole lot more peaceful than paying a visit to one's relations in northern Canada."

Concluding

The GOLDEN HORDE

By HAROLD LAMB

Author of "The Crusades"

The Story Thus Far:

"I have come to Sarai, city of the Golden Horde and capital of Barka Khan," said Paolo Tron, the Genoese jeweler, "not to sell gems but to procure one. A single one that hath no equal."

"Who has such a thing to sell?" asked Nial, knighted son of a crusader, now traveling the caravan route to the unknown East as an unofficial guard to wealthy Paolo Tron.

"I could not buy it," said Tron. "No man could. 'Tis a green emerald, the Green Lion which Barka Khan got at the sack of Bagdad twenty years ago. But I mean to take it. It is hidden in the Altyn-dar, the House of Gold, and I saw it on a previous visit when I repaired some gold work for the khan. I can not steal it, but you can."

Nial protested, but to no avail, for he was obligated to Paolo Tron. On the journey to Sarai, Nial had let thieves steal the semiprecious stones from Tron's jewel box; and impulsively he had pledged anything that Tron might ask as penalty for his carelessness.

So Nial was perforce to become a thief. He was young and tall and handsome, and he carried a great sword which Mardi Dobro, the sorcerer, prophesied would bring good fortune to Barka Khan.

Nial had been born in the Jordanland and knew the Eastern tongues. On the way to the East he had bravely coped with raiders and vandals till the night when vandals had got at Paolo Tron's strongbox—and Nial knew that he had been off his guard because he had permitted a mysterious unveiled woman named Shedda to divert him while the thieves sacked the tent.

Paolo Tron continued:

"Messer Nial, having lost my stock of jewels for me, you will now get for me the Green Lion in this wise: Wear the uniform of a gur-khan—commander of a thousand. Carry a baton of office. Enter the House of Gold disguised as a Tartar officer—"

"And my sword—" said Nial, liking not this deceptive rôle.

"You'll need none." Tron's lips curled in a sneer. "If you must, get a Tartar sword in the bazaar. Also a new horse, a white one, with a Tartar saddle. I will give you thirty byzants, and five for the saddle."

And Nial suddenly reflected that Paolo Tron,

the merchant, had taken care not to have his own hand seen in this daring plan to steal the Green Lion from the secret stronghold of the master of the Golden Horde.

MAKING his way through the Moslem quarter the next day in search of a horse, Nial came face to face with the unexpected. Entering an arched street, he found himself in semi-darkness amid familiar smells of frying mutton and onions, of leather and musk. Except for the cold, he might have been in the bazaar of Aleppo. Everywhere he saw the beards and turbans of Islam, occasionally the fur cap of an Alan or Russian.

If Tron had penetrated this city within a city, he would have been stared at and mocked—for Islam is arrogant to its foes—but Nial, reared among Asiatics, sauntered by unnoticed in his *chaban,* pausing to handle rolls of felt or damask while he listened to the talk. He passed the open gate, with a loose chain hanging over it, of a mosque courtyard, and a glance showed him that scores of desert men were squatting where the sun warmed the stones.

Turning a corner beyond the mosque, Nial found himself in an alley, between lines of horses, where some tribesmen were arguing fiercely with a dealer. He noticed one of the horses, a powerful gray with saddle sores and marks of hard riding. But when a boy came up to accost him and beg him to look at leisure upon the splendid steed, he turned to stare at a shaggy steppe pony.

The boy, however, had seen him sizing up the gray and, after trying two or three languages, being clearly puzzled by the stranger, harangued him in broken Arabic.

"Nay, this one is not suited to your nobility. That one is tall and swift."

"He hath the look of the mule which sired him." Nial bargained with the ease of habit. "Moreover, he hath been ridden by a devil with sharp stirrups. Behold the marks. Nay, I go to see the beasts of—" he searched for a dealer's name— "Mahmoud the Blind."

"By Allah, is not Mahmoud here?"

The dealer, who had been listening with one ear, forsook the tribesmen and hastened over. He used a long staff, and the pupils of his eyes showed white in his pockmarked face. But he moved alertly as one who could see all before him. The boy whispered something that Nial could not catch.

"*Ai-a,*" Mahmoud nodded complacently. "That gray steed is a *kabarda.* It will run down a wolf."

"And leap a tent," put in Nial. "And turn in its tracks at a gallop. Verily this is the breeding place of all lies, and I go."

Loiterers on the balconies that overhung the alley—the whole quarter seemed teeming with men that day—grinned and coughed, nudging each other to listen to the chaffer. Mahmoud cast down his staff and lifted sightless eyes to the sky.

"May dogs litter on my grave! May the Ram come out of the skies, if there is one lie in all my words." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "A hundred byzants would not buy him, if his coat were sleek and fat. Yet will I sell him to your Honor for less. For how much?"

"A fool would pay twenty."

"May Allah teach you wisdom, young lord. Verily, I know this horse, and he is from the stable of Barka Khan. Still, I will forego all profit and give him up for five-and-seventy."

"So do I know of him, and it was the command of the khan to have him slaughtered, and thou didst buy him from the skinner's market."

A cackle of laughter greeted this exchange. All the listeners were well aware that both men were drawing on their imagination. While Nial examined the eyes of the gray, and forced open his jaws, and—remembering a certain Tartar trader—even lifted his tail, the boy brought forth saddles until he found one to Nial's liking. Meanwhile Mahmoud had come down to forty-six, in whispers, and felt for Nial's hand to strike palms on the bargain.

"Nay," quoth the swordsman, "first will I try his paces and see how lame he is. And I will pay no more than thirty, with five for the saddle."

It was a high peaked saddle, and he had to sit forward in the Tartar fashion to keep his knees down. As he tightened the rein Mahmoud hissed warningly, and the boy trotted after him. At the entrance of the alley a voice called softly, almost in his ear:

"Well done, Lord Ni-al. Come in by the door around the corner."

IN THE shadow of the balcony opposite him he saw a veiled girl and he recognized Shedda's voice. When he was clear of the corner he threw the rein to the boy and strode to the door.

"Will it please your nobility," cried the boy hastily, "to make payment now before entering there?"

"Why?"

"Because it happens often that young masters go in there with gold, but never has one come out with anything at all."

Nial smiled as he knocked on the door and then pushed it open. He had a certain matter to settle with Shedda, and he had always found the boldest course the safest. The courtyard proved to be empty, but several pairs of slippers lay outside the house door. Instead of entering here Nial, who did not wish to take off his boots, climbed the narrow stone stairs leading up to the balcony.

This had lattice work around it, and was littered with worn rugs and garments—women's gear. Shedda stepped from the window, holding a great cat on her arm.

"Was not the door of hospitality open, that the noble lord should climb by the women's stair?" she asked impatiently.

And then, sinking down on the best cushions, she smiled. She had discarded her veil, and her splendid hair lay uncovered upon slim shoulders. But Nial could only stare into eyes that matched his own.

"So you have come," she added, "to the house of Mahmoud the Blind to give me back my dagger."

She motioned to the rug beside her, but Nial, looking away with an effort—the magicians have less power in their eyes than a girl of Shedda's training—kept his feet.

"Thou shalt have thy dagger back," he said quietly, wondering why she esteemed the thing so much, "in return for the jewels that were stolen in the *serai*."

Chin propped on her hand, she gazed at him curiously.

"What jewels were they?"

"In my bed, the evening thou didst come to—"somehow Nial could not utter the word steal—"to make pretense of looking at our chests."

Shedda looked amused.

"Did one rob the young lord while he talked with me? I did not know it."

If she had sworn an oath, he would not have believed. As it was, he thought she spoke the truth. He drew the little blade from his wallet and balanced it in his hand.

"Who was the thief, then?"

"I saw him not, and I know him not. Were there many jewels?"

"Many, and not mine."

"The Farangi merchant's?" Shedda pondered, watching him beneath lowered eyelids. "Did he send thee here to me? Knowest thou the work he has in hand?"

Nial's fingers tightened upon the knife, until the sharp edge cut into his skin. Shedda was stroking the cat, but she missed not the least of his movements.

"Did the rich Farangi bid thee give back my dagger and say aught?"

"Not a word. I came to buy a horse."

He wondered again how a girl with Shedda's face could be a slave in the open market, and what she wished of Tron, and how she managed to leave Yashim's caravan. And Shedda seemed to follow his thoughts. Putting the cat aside, she rose to her feet without effort, brushing her hair back from her cheeks.

"Not even a word for the men of Islam?"

"Islam? The Moslems?"

"Hush!" She laid a hand lightly on his arm, and the scent of jessamine crept into his nostrils. "O my lord, hast thou not heard of the Night of Judgment that is coming, when the men of Islam shall have power in their hands and shall cast down the Tartar?"

"Nay, Shedda, I have heard many prophecies, but not this."

Nial thought he heard something move in the room beside him. And he remembered the throngs in the Moslem quarter. Something, no doubt, was brewing among them. Such men were restless as broken thorn bush under the wind.

"Did the Farangi, Tron, not tell thee, my lord, that he is one of us, preparing for the night?"

"He has naught but jewels in his mind," said Nial grimly, "especially those he lost on that other night. Art thou an owlet, Shedda, to whisper in darkness, and to flit from Yashim's house to this?"

"Nay." She laughed gaily. "A parrot am I, to say only what pleases my masters. Now I have escaped from Yashim's guards—they looked too long on the bribe I held out—and I hide in this nest. Do not betray me to Yashim, Lord Ni-al!"

By some magical change she seemed to have become a different woman, full of mirth. The hot blood throbbed in Nial's throat, and he longed to snatch her up and bear her off with him upon the gray charger. Instantly Shedda became silent.

"Here is thy dagger." He laid it in her hand. "But why dost thou cherish it?"

She looked as pleased as a child when a toy is given back.

"It hath a *sigil,* a charm, written upon it." Her slender finger rested briefly on the gold inlaid inscription. "To others it would be naught. To me it is much. Thou art generous." Swiftly as before she seemed to change, to become older, a troubled light in her eyes. "Allah knows I have no worthy gift to give thee in return, Lord Ni-al."

She came closer, her head touching his shoulder, and whispered so low that even a cat could not have heard in the room near them.

"Promise me one thing. If there is war—sudden and fierce as the black windstorm—thou wilt ride hither, at once, turning aside for nothing at all."

Her eyes pleaded silently.

"To aid me," she breathed softly, "for I will need it."

"If there be war, aye."

Nial turned away abruptly, made his way down into the courtyard past the empty slippers. He did not trust himself longer with Shedda. He mounted the gray charger swiftly and trotted back to thrust the money into Mahmoud's hand.

"A noble steed and a princely buyer," cried the blind man. "Come again to look at Mahmoud's horses."

But Nial was already beyond hearing, riding heedlessly, a strange fever in his veins.

FROM the screened balcony Shedda watched him go, and settled back listlessly on the cushions as a man in a red robe, covered by a dervish's camelhair surcoat, crawled through the window and reproached her.

"Eh, has the tall warrior robbed you of wisdom? What said you to him at the end?"

Shedda sat up suddenly.

"What concerns thee not at all, who art a snake, to crawl and steal from these strangers."

It was a chance shot, but it made Mardi Dobro chuckle.

"Eh, the jewels from the sack! While thou and yonder swordsman were exchanging blows and endearments in the *serai,* I ferreted it out, with the skill of a swooping hawk. But the jewels were shining and worthless. They would not buy one sick camel."

The sorcerer rocked thoughtfully on

his heels, his lined face puckered.

"This youth knows naught of the game that is to be played," he murmured.

"Nothing," she assented. "He hath honor in him, and his thoughts can be seen in his face."

"Already he loves thee, O most splendid of women. But as to Tron we know no more than before." Mardi Dobro glanced about him cautiously. "What brought thee to this place? Eh, even the mules shy at this gate of Mahmoud's where the girls he calls his wives wear no veils."

"Yet the girls come and go, and Mahmoud is blind. Much can be seen through this lattice. I have seen hundreds go forth on fresh horses." Shedda shrugged her shoulders and fell to playing with the dagger, flashing the bright steel in the flecks of sunlight, while Mardi Dobro waited patiently for her brooding to end.

"Ahmed and Yashim," she whispered at last, "feed their men with suspense. It is true they number more than twelve thousand. Mahmoud has furnished the horses, while Tron, who knows their plans, hath ships waiting for them at Tana."

"Ships? What have they to do upon the sea?"

"Perhaps they will flee when this thing is done. They will rise and strike and flee."

The *shaman* considered this.

"Today," he muttered, "a writing came by the courier from Tana. Ku Yuan says that—" he barely breathed the words—"the khan hath left the army. Alone, he rides the northern road, very swiftly, changing horses by day and night."

"Alone!"

"To Sarai he draws his reins. He could not loose the army from the war, nor could a single regiment of the Horde keep pace with him. He comes to strike down these heads that are rising up against him here."

"But alone." Shedda tossed her head proudly, even while sudden fear darkened her eyes. "What if the Moslems know of his coming? They will wait at the gates like panthers hunting in the dark."

The *shaman's* thin fingers caught at his hair.

"If they take him—"

"Alive, they could not. But if they slay him and fling his head into the palace!"

Mardi Dobro cringed. Barka Khan ruled with an iron hand, yet without him the alleys of Sarai and all the steppes would be drenched with blood. If the Moslems had spies with the army, word of the khan's coming might reach Sarai ahead of him. A messenger pigeon would outstrip the fastest post horses. And now there was no way to reach Barka Khan with a fresh warning. He might enter Sarai the next day. He might even now be dismounting at some tavern.

"The omens," Mardi Dobro cried.

"Oh, I am weary of portents." Shedda sheathed her dagger angrily. "Go off to thy white bones and smoke!" But as the sorcerer shuffled to his feet, she motioned him back, to whisper, "What say the omens concerning the—this Lord Ni-al of thine."

"Of thine, rather," grumbled Mardi Dobro. "It is as I told thee before at Tana. Then I beheld the ring of misfortune around a silver moon, and a reading of the bone foretold this: that one would come out of the sea marked by a great fortune, yet unaware. Aye, he would give aid to the khan with his sword, unknowing. As the signs foretell, it must be."

AT HIS own courtyard Nial reined in, to look to right and left. There were perhaps a hundred gray chargers like this one in Sarai, but he did not want to be seen leading it into his quarters. The alley was deserted.

Nial led in his horse and, after rubbing it down with hay, gave it some water

and barley. He hung up the saddle and cast a blanket over it, then made his way up to Tron's room.

The merchant lifted his pallid face as he bent over the glowing brazier.

"At last! I see you have the nag. Now must we work apace." His red beard twitched as he spoke. "You must go tonight to the Altyn-dar."

Nial's pulse quickened and he drew a long breath.

"Faith," he said, "I'll eat supper first."

He ate heartily of the food the Greek brought up, but Tron only drank goblet after goblet of wine.

"In the bazaar," he explained, "the rumor runs, Messer Nial, that Barka Khan will ride into Sarai at any hour. I had not looked for that. When the khan is here, the place swarms like a hive, and the Altyn-dar will be full of Tartars. We must try it tonight, after the guard is changed at the fourth hour."

Nial nodded. That would be in about three hours, since the first hour of the night began at sunset.

From his wallet the merchant drew a folded slip of white silk upon which a plan had been sketched.

"Know ye how to read a map, Messer Nial? Good. This is the upper floor of the treasury, where the rarer things are kept. I worked therein, judging precious stones, for hours once. See where the corridors run from the stair-head. This central chamber is called the heart, and it holds the Green Lion with some other jewels of the khan."

Taking the silk in his hand, Nial studied it between mouthfuls.

"You will have this small iron saddle-lantern that burns oil. The Tartars hook them to their belts. I was told the Green Lion stands alone on a marble block."

"And if it doth not—if it is not to be found?"

"Nay, it will be there. I know the khan hath not taken it into the field, and it is always kept in its place." Tron hesitated. "There is a tale that it hath some unseen guard about it, mayhap a spell laid upon it by some ranting pagan sorcerer like the one who carried a bone about in Tana."

He explained that the Altyn-dar was a huge structure, and that once past the guards at the entrance, Nial might see no one until he came out. Nial had watched the Tartars in the street, and had seen them salute each other; and Tron had taught him a word or two of greeting. Unlike the Moslems, the Tartars rarely talked.

"All this I know," put in the swordsman quietly, "but where is the *talsmin?*"

Reluctantly, as if surrendering his own blood, Tron drew from the breast of his tunic a silk wrapped package. Unrolling it, he held out a strange object, a flat oblong of bronze as long as his hand and more than an inch in width.

"Here," he said slowly, "is the key that will unlock all gates and yield to you all that you ask."

Nial took it and examined it. A hole had been pierced in one end and the other bore, in raised gold, a lion's head. Between the two ran an inscription. The characters of the writing were not Arabic, or anything known to him, but they seemed familiar. The inscription on Shedda's dagger had been in these characters, but—Nial had an eye for details—not just the same.

"What says it?" he asked.

" 'By command of Barka Khan, the Lion Lord, obedience shall be given to him who holds this.' It is the Mongol speech, written in Uighur characters. 'Tis called a *paizah,* or tablet. But the tiger and falcon tablets are held by couriers or generals of the Horde. This lion *paizah* grants to its possessor the veritable authority of the khan himself. I think there are not ten of them in all the lands of the Horde."

Nial wondered what had been written on Shedda's dagger.

"Are not these ten possessors known to all men—to all the officers of the khan?" he mused.

"Nay, some are envoys in far lands, and some are secret agents. I had a

man who got one into his hands long enough to make, unseen, a fair impression in wax. From the wax I had this imitation made in Genoa, exact in every item."

Then Tron showed Nial how to hang the *paizah* upon a cord of twisted silk and wear it about his throat under his outer garment.

"In an hour," he muttered, "you will have the great emerald, and this talisman, which could open a way to Tana as fast as the swiftest post horses could gallop."

"Or," added Nial thoughtfully, "I may be hung up for torture like a plucked raven. Have you a sword for me?"

The Genoese looked blank.

"Nay, by God's head, I forgot."

"Then," Nial said, "will I take mine own, for better or for worse."

AFTER the fourth hour of the night he rode out upon the gray horse. From boots to eagle feather he was a Tartar gur-khan. Even his skin had been oiled and the lines about his eyes touched up by the careful Tron. At the first corner he passed a hurrying Moslem, who drew back with a mutter of fear. Nial smiled and rode on leisurely toward the palace. Off to his right he could hear the wail of a muezzin calling a summons:

"Come to prayer—come to prayer. . . . Come to the house of praise . . . No God but God . . ."

This would be the night prayer after the fourth hour, and the punctual Tartars would have changed their guard at the palace. Nial headed through the empty streets toward the height, dim against the stars. Skirting the wall of the Moslem cemetery, he began to ascend a long slope, guiding himself by a fire at the top.

Presently he could make out the helmets of soldiers squatting by the fire, and then their faces. His horse shied suddenly. Looking down, he made out a heap of dark objects that smelled of rotting bone. They were human heads, some shrunk to the bone and others picked bare by the kites. Tightening his rein, he rode past this place of execution, and was saluted by a solitary horseman who glanced at him, lifting his right hand and carrying it to his mouth.

"*Ahatoul*" Nial muttered acknowledgment.

He was by the outer guard, and the loom of rock walls fell behind him. His horse neighed as he trotted along the stone fence of a remount corral—the Horde kept its horses close at hand—and a mounted guard turned to watch him casually. Tron had told him how to go; by the well beyond the corral, past the barrack and the dark palace of Barka Khan, to the dome of the Altyndar.

When he reined in, with the mass of the dome over his head and a high, blank wall confronting him, he delayed an instant before dismounting. He could still turn back and ride down into Sarai, and every instinct in him cried out to do so. Narrow embrasures peered at him, like veiled eyes, and he knew that human eyes were watching him.

He had proof of this at once because the arched gate, looming black in the gray wall, creaked, and by the glimmer of his small lantern he saw one half of it swing toward him. It opened enough for a horse to pass through, and a Tartar with a shield came out and stood aside casually.

He could not hesitate, because uncertainty would bring questions that he could not answer. Swiftly he reflected that the men of the Horde went everywhere in the saddle, even from one end of a street to the other. And surely there would be other guards with lights somewhere within. This man could only be a gatekeeper. Nial urged his horse forward, bending his head under the arched portal.

He was in a square chamber with blank stone walls except on the right where an inclined way led gradually up.

Glancing over his shoulder, he saw the guard close the half of the gate and bar it. Lights gleamed at the head of the ramp a stone's throw away, and Nial started to ascend it, his ears strained for a challenge.

The darkness behind him remained soundless as a tomb. Nial noticed that narrow embrasures pierced the inner wall upon his left. And holes appeared in the arched ceiling. Arrows and fire could be showered upon any invaders of the ramp. His horse plodded up, switching his tail and pricking his ears forward. Torches flared and smoked above them at the head of the inclined way.

Here he was halted. A guard stepped forward and caught his rein. Nial swung down from his stirrup, rubbing his hands against his hips to dry them. Under his long blue coat hung his sheathed sword.

One of the Tartars called out, and the darkness of the ramp echoed in answer. Nial saw that in front of him a similar inclined way led down, and he wondered briefly what lay below. Then an officer confronted him with a guttural question.

Without hurrying, Nial drew the *paizah* from the breast of his coat. At once the Tartars, even the torch bearers, fell to their knees, lowering their heads to the floor. Nial forced himself to wait until the officer had risen; then he replaced the tablet, unhooked the lantern from his belt and turned to ascend the stairs on his left.

He moved stiffly as if he had been long in the saddle, and he did not look behind him.

"They may send an arrow or a man after me," he thought, "but at least they can't talk to me now."

At the turning of the stair he glanced down. The Tartars were tying the horse to a ring in the wall. Only the officer stared after him, as if puzzled. Nial drew a long breath of relief as he climbed the last steps. And then he stopped in his tracks.

Red eyes glared at him, and he lifted his lantern hastily. From a black basalt stand a green beast glimmered, and it was a moment before he saw that it was a grotesque lion of jade with rubies for eyes. And behind the lion appeared shapes out of a magician's dream.

THE djinn himself might have brought his treasures to this House of Gold. Upon a table of clear crystal stood a horse so exquisitely wrought in gold, it must have been the work of Greek artists a thousand years before. Beyond the table were piled in haphazard fashion ivory images that must have come from an emperor's tomb. Against the wall stood great plaques of gold, set with lapis-lazuli.

Involuntarily he stopped to stare at a throne upon a dais of polished jasper. It was ebony inlaid with pearl, and its arms glowed with the violet-purple of amethysts. On the seat an empty skull gaped at him, and Nial was wondering if the skull was that of the monarch who had once sat upon the throne, when the shadows swayed and danced before him, although he had not moved his lantern.

He caught the pad-pad of felt boots behind him and saw a guard with drawn sword making toward him. When the Tartar came up, Nial was studying the white silk Tron had given him, as if verifying some list. When the guard would have come closer to stare at him, Nial turned, letting the man see the *paizah* hanging in plain sight on his chest.

"Kai!"

The man shrank back, falling to his knees. For awhile he waited, as if expecting a command, and then, as Nial took no notice of him, he hurried off toward distant voices.

As soon as he was out of sight, Nial sought for the jewel chamber beyond which the great emerald was kept. Tron's map had been carefully drawn, and he found himself at the entrance of the center room.

No need to search for the emerald. In the faint lantern light it gleamed at him from its dark marble base, which looked as if it had once been an altar. So fierce was the fire within it, that the lantern seemed the dimmer of the two, and it was a moment before Nial could make out the crude lion's head into which the great jewel had been cut.

As he stepped forward he was aware of two things—the air felt fresher here and, except for some chests about the dark marble pedestal, the chamber was empty, quiet. Yet something stirred and something else creaked, as he stood before the marble. He stretched out his hand to pick up the emerald—but it was gone.

"The devil!" he cried involuntarily.

A black hole appeared in the marble where the emerald had been, and as Nial bent forward to peer into the hole the silence of the chamber was broken by a hissing chuckle.

He leaped back his own full length, for the sound had come from above. And then he threw down his lantern. For he had seen an opening in the ceiling above the marble stand. As his lantern went out an arrow crashed down, striking sparks from the floor where he had stood two seconds before.

NIAL turned, plunging into the darkness among the piled up treasures beyond. He stumbled against what seemed to be a pile of armor and stopped to listen.

High over his head something wailed up skyward and dwindled to a faint, clear whistle. And he heard a pounding of feet and shouting below him.

Even while he drew his sword from beneath his coat he frowned thoughtfully. The Tartars were not wont to make such a tumult, and it seemed to him he could hear weapons clashing far off.

" 'Tis a very breeding place of spells," he muttered, seeking through the darkness for an embrasure.

Presently he came to one, a narrow slit for archers. And he stared out, amazed. Below him torches flamed and turbaned heads tossed. Steel flashed, and a great shout went up.

"Yah allah—il allah!"

Down at the gate of the Altyn-dar massive iron thundered against wood. A ram, that would be. Nial saw one of the torchbearers below drop back with an arrow through his throat.

"Now this," he told himself, "is neither spell nor hocus. Faith, I had no hand in it."

Several Tartars with lights ran past without heeding him and disappeared down the stairs toward the entrance. Nial felt his way after them until he could look down upon the landing below.

Here the officer and a score of guards were working their bows at the embrasures, while his gray horse jerked restlessly at its tether. Nial realized that the Moslems were attacking the Altyn-dar in force.

"And so," he considered, "the fire burns hot and the pot boils apace."

If the Moslems had invaded the palace height, his life would be worth little outside these walls. While, within, the Tartars would not be long in discovering his disguise and making him prisoner. The Green Lion lay beyond his reach. He could have filled his belt with jewels from a chest, unheeded, for by now all the guards must be in the fight below him. But he had no mind to loot like a bazaar thief, and to be caught like one.

Yet he did snatch up a shield, a heavy round shield embossed with silver, from a pile of armor on the landing. As he did so the gate of the House of Gold came down with a crash, and the Moslems outside roared in exultation.

Thrusting his arm into the shield, Nial ran down to the lower landing. He need hide behind a mask no longer. Now he would have to fight his way out.

The ramp was an inferno. Three-deep the Tartars stood, shield to shield, across the inclined way, beating back

the flood of Moslems that surged into the gate. Arrows hissed above them. Nial stopped short, seeing more Tartars trotting up out of the darkness on his left. They passed him on the landing and ran down into the fight. Nial had not seen them before among the guards and he thought they must have made their way into the Altyn-dar through another door. Loosing his horse and gripping the rein, Nial started down the other ramp, away from the tumult. If men were coming in, he might get out.

He had his hands full with the shield and the rearing horse, and he had to thrust his way blindly among the warriors. Then, around a turning, he saw a gray half light and came to an open postern. It was a moment before he could drag his horse into the narrow opening, and another moment before he could get a foot into the stirrup of the restless beast outside. He saw that they were in a walled garden, through which the Tartars were passing from their barracks. The postern was hidden by trees, and the Moslems did not seem to be aware of it.

Nial circled the garden, and the gray horse headed of its own accord out of a half-seen gate.

When houses closed in around him, Nial found himself in a quarter of the city he did not know. He turned to the right, seeking Mahmoud's horse market. Rounding a corner, he came suddenly upon torchlight and din. The gray charger swerved violently and brought up against another horse.

It was a Moslem's mount. Five other horsemen of Islam jostled each other and circled, to get at a solitary rider who had backed into an angle of the alley wall—a Tartar officer in a white camelhair *chaban*. Nial caught a glimpse of his lean, tense face, and the flash of precious stones upon the hand guard of his long scimitar.

The Tartar, who had no shield, wielded his sword with desperate skill. As Nial rode into the fight he tossed the scimitar from his right to his left hand, as the Moslems drew back for an instant, and slashed open the face of one of his foes. But his horse was bleeding, staggering with weariness, and he could not hold off five men for long.

The Moslem beside Nial gave tongue.

"Yah hai!"

He swung up his curved blade, and Nial thrust up his shield to meet a blow that numbed his arm.

Before the Moslem could strike again, Nial had drawn his long sword.

Flushed, with glaring eyes, the Moslem pressed upon him, whirling high the short scimitar. Instead of guarding himself, Nial thrust with all his strength, the point of his straight blade passing through the other's thick beard and grating against bone. The man reared in his stirrups and came down against the wall when Nial jerked out his sword.

For the moment he was free and could have drawn out of the fight. But if he did so, the lone Tartar was doomed. Already the Moslems were baying like hounds before a kill.

"O dog—taste thou of death!"

And Nial went into the fight again. A Moslem wheeled to meet him, on his shield side. Nial was slashed on the hip and felt the frame of his shield snap. As the Moslem drove against him, knee to knee, Nial smashed his broken shield into the panting face. Drawing back his sword, he thrust through the man's ribs, and the rider of the black horse laughed beside him.

Then Nial's horse, flicked by a saber, reared frantically, trying to turn against the wall. He grasped at his reins, slippery with blood, expecting to be slashed with steel. But only two men remained to face the gallant Tartar and, as Nial reined his horse forward again, they turned and fled. Through the sweat that dripped into his eyes he saw that both were wounded.

The Tartar of the white *chaban* looked at him curiously and smiled.

"Ahatou!"

He said something else, pointing to the alley behind them. A Tartar

mounted patrol had halted to peer in at the fighting. The rider of the black horse wheeled to meet them.

But Nial had no wish to be questioned by the Tartars. He galloped into the darkness after the two wounded men.

BEHIND the lattice of the house of Mahmoud the Blind Shedda crouched in fear. The night was full of new sounds and perils, and she listened as heedfully as any animal in a cage.

Men were looting the horse market, while Tartar houses burned. A distant wailing of women told of other plundering. A boy rode by on a soldier's horse with a sable cloak over his knee, shouting with all his lungs:

"Allah hath opened the gates of plunder. O brothers, come forth!"

A beggar hurried beneath the balcony, clutching a silk dress. There were dark stains upon the silk. At the corner he ran into another thief. There was an oath and a blow, and one of the shadows screeched. The alley men were out with knives to snatch what they could.

Anxiously the girl looked toward the palace height. The torches thronging into the House of Gold looked like fireflies at that distance. She knew the Moslems must have forced their way in; and if they took the House of Gold they would have in their hands the treasure of the khan. Such a victory would bring new allies out of the rabble, and all Sarai would be looted.

"Yield thyself, O red she-tiger," a mocking voice cried up at her. "We know thou art the slave of the pagan khan. Verily, Yashim longs for thee. He will prepare needles to take sight from thine eyes that were the eyes of the khan who now lies slain in the mud."

Stifling an exclamation, Shedda drew back from the lattice. Two men had stopped beneath the balcony. She heard them pass around the corner and enter the courtyard, and she wondered if they had been taunting her idly, or if they had come in search of her. To flee out of the house into the streets would be madness. She burrowed among the cushions and held her breath to listen.

Hoofs clattered on loose stones below, and some one shouted. Steel clashed once, and footsteps hastened away. Then the courtyard became silent.

"O Shedda," a deep voice called, "I have come hither for thee."

The girl wrapped her *khalat* about her and hastened down the stair. Here was a shield for her, and a strong arm to strike for her. She greeted him softly.

"O Lordling Ni-al, I was in sore need of thee." Then she caught her breath, peering up at him. "What is this? Hast thou changed thy shape?"

"Aye," said Nial.

Shedda saw no sign of the Moslems. Nor was any one else with the tall Christian. And the girl felt that, by changing his shape, this man with the long sword in his hand had become grim and purposeful.

"Why hast thou come for me?"

"I gave thee a promise." Nial threw the rein over the head of a horse he had seized on the way. "I saw the *talsmin*, the dagger that bears the sign of the khan. Knowing that thou didst serve the khan, I feared for thee, alone among the Moslems."

"Death is near us." The girl caught his hand in hers, as a frightened child might have done. "What can we do?" A moment before she had known terror, and the chill of it was still about her heart.

"We can go from here."

He lifted her into the saddle of the other horse, and while she pulled a heavy veil over her head and long hair, he mounted the tired gray charger. Through the dark alleys he led the way to Tron's quarters. But the chamber was empty, without a sign of the merchant.

Nial did not want to take refuge behind a door. If the Moslems became masters of Sarai, nothing was more certain than that they would hunt down all Unbelievers, and he knew what the sack of a city meant. Better to try his

luck with Shedda in the open.

In the courtyard the girl greeted him excitedly.

"Listen! An arrow has called."

That part of Sarai was nearly quiet, and presently Nial heard very faintly the long drawn whistle that had startled him in the Altyn-dar. It rose into the air, dwindled, then sounded clearly again.

"A Tartar arrow, a whistling arrow," she explained eagerly. "A summons to rally, to come together."

She urged her horse out into an open space, where frightened Armenians huddled like sheep around a bearded priest, waiting for misfortune. Shedda peered over the housetops and cried out. High on the palace height a white ball of light shone.

"The great lantern is lighted. And Barka Khan has come. *Akh!* He is here now." She clapped her hands eagerly, and the shaggy heads of the Armenians turned toward her fearfully. "O ye People of the Book," she cried at them, "now there will truly be fighting."

They looked at her, voiceless with new fear, but Nial made up his mind.

"Take me to this khan of thine," he said.

"Aye, what else?" Shedda was aglow with hope, and he wondered a little at that. "Now thou art a Tartar, Ni-al, and the khan loves a good swordsman. Come!" And they put their horses to a gallop, for speed was the best safeguard. She explained, "The light is over the dome of the House of Gold, and there the *noyons* of the Horde will gather at the signal. I know a way into the dome that leads not through any gate. This way!"

No one tried to halt them because the girl chose narrow streets where only men on foot were seen, and these gave way readily to two galloping horses. When they passed the cemetery, the girl reined in her horse and entered a garden.

They tied the tired animals in a clump of cypress, and Shedda slipped through the cypresses to the hillside beyond, where white marble appeared in the dark earth.

"This is a door known to few, only to those who bear the Lion or the Falcon. But that is a thing beyond thy knowing, my lordling." She laughed and pressed against one side of the marble with her hands. "Why, it is open. One has gone in before us. Come, thou."

Impatiently she caught his hand and led him into darkness, until she paused to feel about the wall on one side.

"Here should be a lantern. What art thou doing?"

Nial was cutting the cord that secured the *paizah* about his neck. He cast the bronze tablet into the mouth of the passage behind him.

"I threw away a cord that might have strangled me."

The girl's soft fingers touched his face and felt for his arm.

"We must be quick. Here is dry flax and steel and flint. Canst thou make it light?"

Sheathing his sword, Nial took the implements and began to strike sparks. He was rid of the *paizah,* and his Tartar dress could cause no harm now if he were brought into the House of Gold by this girl who knew the secret of the hill passage. When the flax broke into flame, she held out a hand lamp, shaking it to make sure there was oil in it, and lighted the wick.

"Now we will find the khan," she promised, smiling.

And when Shedda smiled, with her veil thrown back over the red-gold mass of her hair, she was lovely beyond belief. Excitement brightened her clear eyes and brought the color into her cheeks.

"Aye, lead the way."

But Shedda laughed, running ahead, the scent of flowers hanging in the air behind her. Nial had to quicken his pace to keep up with her.

The passage ascended steadily, turn-

ing often. Its stone walls rumbled faintly with echoes of trampling feet outside. Nial noticed that wet tracks of a man's riding boots went before them. A Tartar wearing high heels had passed that way within the hour.

"NOW are we in the House of Gold," Shedda called to him, "but none can see us. Those who are trusted by the khan come in this way, and only the watchers under the dome know of its inner door. *They* do not speak."

Lifting the lamp, she nodded at the massive foundation walls of a square chamber into which the tunnel had led them. From one corner a spiral stair led up, winding into a passage so narrow that Nial had to turn his shoulders to enter. Shedda tripped ahead of him, around turn after turn, until she stopped at a door of heavy wood.

"We are under the dome," she whispered. "I can hear the *noyons* talking, so we are safe, O my Lord of Battles."

Setting down the lamp, she turned to Nial, so close that her fragrant hair brushed his cheek, and her eyes caressed his. Swiftly her parted lips brushed his cheek, and she smiled as if rewarding a child. Then she lifted her hand and struck the bronze knocker upon the door four times, then thrice slowly.

Steps approached the door, a lock clicked faintly, and the passage was flooded with white light. Nial and Shedda entered the very heart of the treasure house. And the girl drew from her breast a bronze tablet smaller than the one Nial had discarded, bearing on it a falcon's head. At sight of it two tall Chinese guards bowed and stepped back.

"Ai!" Shedda cried. "The khan is not here."

There were officers standing at embrasures, and boxes of messenger pigeons by the walls. Couriers came and went by other doors, and the place was tense with the suspense of battle dimly heard in the night. Sharp exclamations echoed under the immense dome that formed the walls and roof of this lofty post of command. The white light came from a ball of malachite or painted glass hung under the summit of the dome, and Nial saw that this summit was an opening to the sky. Perhaps astrologers used the dome, or messenger pigeons came in through the aperture, he conjectured; but Shedda was too occupied in listening to the rapid talk of the Tartars to explain. No one heeded him for the moment, and he went to an embrasure to look out.

Far down the palace height, beyond the wall, a line of torches flared and shifted. Masses of Tartar cavalry moved downward against the light, and volleys of arrows flickered from them. They were outnumbered by the mobs below them, but they were gaining ground. Fighting was going on in the cemetery. The Moslems had been driven out of the House of Gold, out of the palace height.

Nial watched, until the torches broke up into little groups in the alleys of Sarai below him, or died out, and the roar of conflict dwindled to a murmur.

"Barka Khan did that." Shedda, at his elbow, had guessed his thoughts. "In the moment when Yashim and his friends were in the very treasure house, he came and took command and led an attack. Even the watchers of the Green Lion took up arms to follow him. Look!"

She led Nial to the center of the floor and pointed down through a square aperture. Then she cried out, bending down to see more clearly what lay below. Nial peered over her shoulder.

The white light above him penetrated through the aperture to the floor below. Directly under Nial stood a black marble shaped like an altar, and sprawled out before it lay the body of Paolo Tron the Genoese, the tufted end of a great arrow projecting from his chest. One hand clutched the base of the marble, and his teeth gleamed

through the tangle of his red beard.

"Thy companion!" The girl shivered and turned to speak to one of the Chinese archers. "He says that Tron ran into the chamber of the khan's jewels when the Moslems broke into the upper floor. An emerald called the Green Lion was kept upon that marble, twice guarded. If a thief approached it, by stepping upon the stone before it, he released a spring that let the emerald fall into a cavity below the marble stand. And these Cathayan bowmen keep watch over the khan's jewels. They are ordered to shoot down any one unknown to them who enters that room. They say Tron searched about the marble as if mad—"

One of the Chinese caught her arm and drew her back, while Nial stared down at the dead merchant. So Tron had come himself for the great emerald, and since he had come with the Moslems, he had known of the attack to be launched upon the House of Gold. But he had not warned Nial. He had feared that the Tartars would make off with the khan's jewels, or that the Moslem onset would fail, and he had sent Nial ahead to carry off the emerald.

Nial's brain was weary, and his wounds in forearm and thigh ached. He saw that Shedda was staring at him strangely, while the Tartar officers were crowding around him. Some of them spoke to him, but the girl thrust her way to his side.

"O Ni-al," she cried, "these watchers of Cathay say that thou didst come earlier in the night and try to take the emerald. Others say thou didst show a *shir-paizah* at the gate. How—"

One of the officers brushed her aside and growled a question at the Christian. When Nial did not answer, he reached out and tore open the throat of his coat. Finding no trace of the *paizah,* he snarled and reached for the Christian's sword. But Nial was not minded to give up his weapon. He sprang back and set his shoulders against the door of the passage by which he had entered. He felt behind him and pushed against the door, but found that it had been locked.

Instead of closing in on him, the Tartars stood rigid in their tracks. Even the Chinese bowmen turned and bent their heads before a man who had entered alone, muddy to the waist, with a white camelskin *chaban* flung over his wide shoulders. His cheeks were gaunt, and a stain of dried blood ran from his thin lips to his wide chin. But his eyes, restive as a hawk's, fastened instantly upon Nial.

"Throw down thy weapon!" Shedda besought Nial. "The khan—it is death to hold a drawn weapon near him." And as Nial, with set face, clasped his sword grimly, she began to wail. "*Ai-a!* Fool —bringer of misfortune!"

Nial recognized the khan as the Tartar who had been at bay before six foemen in the alley.

But Shedda flung herself on her knees before the tall master of the Horde, fearing for her life. She had brought the Christian hither, vouching for him at the door, and now he stood armed against the most dreaded soul of the steppes.

"O LORD of the West and the East," she cried, "O Victorious Lion—"

A gesture from Barka Khan, who understood Arabic, brushed away her praise of him. The girl, however, had thought of a way to clear herself of blame, and her voice shrilled on:

"My Khan, this man is a foe. I drew his secret from him, and kept watch upon him, until I brought him hither to thee. He is a Nazarene from the West like that other, his comrade who lies dead below us, but skilled in swordplay. He changed his shape and came to open the gate to thy foes the Moslems. He carried a *shir-paizah—*" her quick wit seized upon a faint memory— "which he threw away at the mouth of the dome passage. Now behold him, at thy mercy."

Barka Khan drew the soggy gloves from his hands and let them fall in silence.

"Hast thou a witness?" he asked the girl after a moment.

"Aye, my Khan." Shedda looked up at him reverently. "Mardi Dobro, the reader of omens."

"He is at the gate. Bring him."

When a warrior ran from the chamber to seek Mardi Dobro, the khan took a cup from the hand of a servant and drank a little. Holding the cup, he walked quietly to Nial, even coming within arm's reach although his scimitar was in its sheath at his side.

"Thou hast heard—understood? What word hast thou to say?"

Nial smiled wearily. What could he say? Shedda's betrayal would stand against any denial.

"I came," he said bluntly, "knowing naught of the Moslems. I came to steal the great emerald called the Green Lion for this other man, who was my friend."

For a moment the dark eyes of the Tartar lord met the blue eyes of the crusader's son. Then he turned on his heel to go and stare down the opening at Tron's body.

The color came again into Shedda's cheeks. Even the dead Genoese served to prove her tale, and she relied upon Mardi Dobro's cunning. When the *shaman* entered, the khan turned upon him instantly.

"What is this man, O interpreter of omens, who hath changed his shape and now stands before me with a drawn sword?"

A single glance told Mardi Dobro the story of Nial's set face and the anger of the Tartars. Running forward, he threw himself down before the khan, beating his shaggy head against the floor. His wrinkled face tensed with anxiety, for Barka Khan was the only human being the *shaman* feared.

"At the Sea Gate," he croaked, "I beheld this youth land from the sea, bearing this sword. In that hour I read the omen of the fire upon bone. Clearly I saw the sign, that this sword was bound up with thy life, as an arrow with its feather."

The listeners edged closer, for this was a strange sign that had proved true. Even Barka Khan was deeply attentive.

"For good or evil?" he asked.

Mardi Dobro's green eyes gleamed shrewdly.

"For evil," he lied. "Behold, I warned thee of perils gathering, rising against thee, and now is this sword come against thee, as the sign foretold."

Nial tightened his muscles, to await the speeding of an arrow from the long bows of the Chinese guards who had drawn near him, weapons in hand. Barka Khan struck his hands together in anger.

"This night," the khan said grimly, "there has been too much changing of shapes. I have listened to words that hide like foxes in tall grass. Thy words—" he turned to Shedda— "were lies. This bearer of a sword was not among the Moslems; he was beside me. And thy sign," he added to the startled *shaman,* "was false. The sword struck down two of my foemen, giving me life."

He strode to Nial and touched his arm.

"The khan does not turn his face from one who has shed blood for him. I know naught of what is behind thee. It is like a mist over the water. Now sheath thy sword and fear not. Thou hast taken the shape of a gur-khan of my guard. Be one. But—" he smiled slightly— "do not change thy shape again."

Shedda tried to touch the edge of his *chaban,* and Mardi Dobro muttered frantically, but Barka Khan heeded them no more than the stones of the floor. He had been six days and almost as many nights in the saddle; he had cut his way through the streets of Sarai to get here. He had been wounded more than once, and had hours of fighting ahead before he could rest.

"Come to me," he said over his shoulder to Nial, "after the time water takes to boil."

One of the officers brought a cup of spiced wine to Nial, and another asked if he would accept a horse, a *kabarda.*

Nial sheathed his sword, emptied the cup and drew a long breath.

"Aye," he said.

With the *noyons* of the khan, he went from the chamber under the dome. Gray light filtered through the embrasures, and sunlight flashed upon a distant snowy peak. The giant Chinese resumed their vigil, and quiet settled down upon the House of Gold. Shedda clutched her cloak about her, shivering. She lived, but she had been scorned by Barka Khan, who had not even troubled to slay her; and Nial no longer had eyes for her beauty.

"Fool, and son of a witless dog," she whispered at the *shaman,* "to lie to thy lord. He spoke the truth."

But Mardi Dobro did not hear her. In stricken silence he was turning over between his fingers the shoulder bone of a sheep that had prevailed against the power of armed men and his own cunning.

THE END

Today's Raw Bronc

(*First Week in the Cow Business*)

AS TOLD BY GIL STRICK
TO FREDERIC MERTZ

YOU have certainly risked money if you bet that you can foresee the rest of the week on the strength of a cow horse's performance on the first ride. Lots of times I have got a horse that backfired on the second day. That is, he bucked harder on the second ride than on the first.

I remember a pinto colt that hadn't caused no trouble on the first day, behaving well both under saddle and riding. The second morning he saddled easy without any help. And, even after I had stepped on, he moved away very quiet beside the snub horse. But we hadn't proceeded more than a hundred and fifty yards when a little ground-sparrow flew up in front of him in kind of a flurry, and right there that pinto broke in two.

He whirled away from the other horse and backed square into the haze man's *tapadero*—the long leather covering for a stirrup, much used in brushy country. With the bird in front and the *tapadero* behind, life went up in blue smoke for that horse. He tried a disappearing act, spreading all four feet and then jumping ahead with vicious bucks as I spurred him.

That wasn't the worst, because he come straight at a cement watering trough. I was anticipating that this would stop him but, though he wasn't old, his brake linings failed. He tried to jump, miscalculated and fell as he jumped. Horse and saddle and I were baptized sideways in that six-by-six trough. And—would you believe it?—this baptism was exactly what he needed to make as good a top horse as you'd care to see. But I could not advise any horse breaker to play this as a system.

In fact, come to think of it, I doubt

that there is much system to rely on during a pony's first week in the cow business. It depends some on the breed of the horse, and some on the way he has taken to handling on the first day. If he is cold blooded and of the work-horse type, but small enough for a saddlehorse, he is usually easy to break; and after the first ride he generally calms down quick.

But thoroughbreds or half-thoroughbreds are the hair-trigger type—the kind that scare at shadows or get a mad streak on and champ at the bit. They must be handled easier than a cold blooded horse. This is one of the reasons I favor the hackamore over the bit, as with the hackamore they can't drag it back and forth and make their mouths sore.

I believe in giving a horse the benefit of what sense he's got. If you take a cold blooded horse that kicks, put him in the barn and give him a taste of the whip, likely he'll quit his foolishness. But with thoroughbreds it's different. When you bully thoroughbreds you invite a fight. Break their spirit, and you ruin them; they have to be outsmarted.

To cure them of the kicking habit, tie them in the barn and behind them fasten up a cowhide or something else that waves. They can kick at that without doing damage, and they get used to something behind them that doesn't hurt when they kick at it. Pretty soon, of their own accord, they give up. That cowhide wouldn't mean nothing to a cold blooded horse. He would turn around and try to eat it; and when he found out that it wasn't good feed, he'd start his leg work all over again.

Going back to the roan that we are bringing up in the cow business: The second day I lead him to the watering trough, water him, take him back to a small corral and try to saddle him without a snub man, and probably without success too. I then call in the snub man and his horse. On this second day's riding, the colt will likely give several jumps, but will presently submit to the same treatment with the hackamore that he had taken the day before. Being pulled to one side and the other, he gets used to the rider's way of guiding him.

After half an hour of turning, stopping, and getting off and on, we take our roan out on the flats to ride him. Look out for one thing: When a colt is being ridden, he handles his feet like a baby trying to walk. He has no idea of the adjustment of weight on his back. If you go easy with him, he will learn to pick up his feet and walk quick with long sliding steps. Cowboys appreciate a good walking horse; and a long-striding horse is called the "dinner horse" because he doesn't take so long to get to the home ranch or the cook wagon for dinner.

I would ride this roan colt about six miles the second day, if he behaves. If not, back he goes to the corral. Ride a young horse too far the second day, and you get him so tired he is harder to work the next time.

If the ride is successful, you come back, take the saddle off, wash his back thoroughly and start getting him used to leading. Walk about in front of him with the hackamore lead-rope; and when he does not respond, pull the rope hard. After awhile you will have him so he takes the saddle blanket across his back without a tussle. He'll stand and shiver, afraid of having the hackamore jerked. And pretty soon he'll be ready to let you saddle and unsaddle him from either side.

It may seem strange, wanting to get on the cow horse from the right side as well as the left. But there are plenty of spots and predicaments where a man sure appreciates a horse that takes mounting from either side.

Once I was riding a thoroughbred mare in country where an old cow that had been on the fight had gone into the brush. I followed her and she turned on me, hooking the mare and cutting a deep gash. On my left was a good sized

oak bush; on the right was clear ground for several feet. You can see that this didn't give any choice of sides. But when I stepped off, this mare kicked at me because she had never been taught that the right side could be used for mounting and dismounting.

That is why it is good medicine, when saddling, to work on both sides of the horse so as not to gentle him on the left side only. You can find horses on 'most any ranch that are foolish about the right side because they haven't been worked as they should be, not necessarily because they've been whipped or beaten.

After our roan has been taught that he's got two sides, I turn him into the corral where he is fed and watered for the night. The next day I ride him alone. This ride can go on as long as five hours, not faster than a walk if possible, though sometimes a colt will break into a trot of his own accord because that is his natural gait. After getting him back to the corral again and letting him eat for an hour or two, he's ready for whip-breaking with the blacksnake whip used in driving mule teams.

This is the way he learns to come to me. I use the lash, popping it around him rather than whipping him. When he starts toward me, I back up. If he turns away, and most likely he will, he must be cut a little with the lash, just to give him the right ideas. But when he gets those ideas he should be petted so that he knows this was what you were intending for him to do. Then it is a good plan to leave him to figure out things till the next morning.

The fourth day is just a repeat of the third, but the fifth day is different. This time you start riding, maybe with some of the boys, maybe alone. Anyway, you will let your colt gallop for about a quarter-mile. Pull him up sometimes and make him walk without trotting, because your purpose is to bring him from walk to gallop, or gallop to walk. This is done by spurring him when you start, causing him to break into a gallop from the jump. In stopping him, pull him into a slide, so that he raises his front feet off the ground about six inches and pushes to a stop with his rear feet. Any good cow horse must do this to be balanced for a turn if necessary.

The rest of the week you have to keep reminding him of the tricks he has already learned. To my idea a vacation should be given this horse about the end of the week. He is probably sore in his muscles. At his new work he is like a human starting off on a strange job. He's had to get reorganized and now he needs a little rest. I would give the roan colt at least four to five days off.

Then, coming back to him, if he was a little snorty I would use the same methods of catching, saddling and riding as when I started to break him. The advantage of these lay-offs is that, when a horse learns how to take a vacation, he has learned how to start working again without completely forgetting his work habits.

Like the rest of us, a horse is better if he knows how to get through the holidays without having them make him forget everything he knew before he started.

HOME GUARD

By the Author of "Snow in the Pass"

By
WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

FRED BARTON, the engineer, took pains not to look down at his fireman while Engine 797, running extra west, trailed its train of eighteen deadhead coaches into the yard at Ottoman. The heat rays, under the glaring Kansas sun, danced up from the network of rails. As Fred headed into No. 1 track, his cab passed a red caboose in the alley to his right, and his level gray eyes narrowed slightly as he tried to avoid thinking about that other train. He knew that Alf, his fireman, was glaring across the cab at him and he tried not to heed Alf's stare. He felt that Alf was going to say what was on his mind, and he daren't let Alf suspect.

It was said that Fred Barton knew no emotions. Nature had bestowed upon him a big-boned frame and a ponderous person. Normally his movements, both mental and physical, were vastly deliberate; everything he did bore the stamp of definite, meticulous thoroughness. That certain emotions were tearing at his very vitals now no one would suspect, unless it were Alf; and that was what Fred feared. It was silly, Fred told himself, to be going on inside himself like this. If only Alf wouldn't speak . . .

Fred was conscious of passing the assorted cars on the track to his right. But he wasn't looking at them. Crazy voices in his brain were telling him that Leon Cardle had brought those cars into Ottoman almost a full hour ahead of him, and that he shouldn't have let Cardle, who had left the initial division point behind him, get around him back there on the road.

Cardle! Cardle! The very name was becoming a nightmare, running through his mind endlessly.

The extra clanked slowly along, barely creeping. Black smoke boiled in a bil-

lowing cloud from the tall stack of the old consolidation engine. Muddy water bubbled out, steamed as it dried in rust-red streaks on the smoke box jacket. Fred closed his throttle, applied air to the wheels of his coaches.

About him were the scenes that he had known for almost fifteen years—the squat shanties, the drab hulk of the coal chutes, the shining stretch of the main line. For more than fifteen years he had been an integral part of them, and still was; but somehow he seemed far removed from them since this upheaval in the quiet pattern of his life, which had happened some forty-eight hours ago.

Without realizing it, he shook his big head slowly from side to side. He brought his coaches to a noisy, grinding halt. Avoiding Alf's stare, he took a ball of cotton waste, dropped to the ground on the left side of the engine cab, removed his gloves and wiped his big hands. Across the main line stood the company eating house where the crews gathered to take on personal fuel. He did not immediately glance toward it, but stood wiping the grime from his hands.

Just then a cloud passed over the sun, and Fred, half turning at the waist, glanced up at the sky. A breath of hot wind touched his face. Slowly he crumpled the ball of waste between his fingers, tossed it aside and strode toward the eating house.

In mid-stride he halted, the forced smile quickly dying on his wide lips. Standing at the lunchroom door he saw Cardle, tall and wide of shoulder, yet trimly built. Cardle was wearing his Sunday best.

Fred glanced at his watch and saw that it was 12:35.

"Uh-huh! You see that, don't you?" Alf, the fireman, spoke at Fred's side. Alf nodded toward the erect, swaggering figure that was just then entering the restaurant door. "I knew it, by hell!"

"Knew what?" Fred said listlessly.

He took another step forward, with Alf beside him.

"You knew it too," Alf said, squinting up at the big hoghead. "Knew right along why Cardle was so dead set on overtakin' an' passin' us back yonder. Fred, you're a damn fool. You should 'a' kep' him back of you."

Fred winced inwardly.

"Me?" He tried to act surprised. "I should have kept Cardle back of me?"

"Don't try to kid me, Fred," Alf retorted. "You know what he's up to just as well as I do. Don't deny it, either. Cardle left Allison runnin' west behind us a full hour, didn't he?"

"Sure." Fred didn't know how to get Alf off the subject.

"All right, you big ox," Alf went on mercilessly. "Why in hell did he run the wheels off his engine an' overtake us? Why did he make the stink he did about goin' around us, since he wasn't goin' any further'n Ottoman, here, an' we was goin' on through? Why? You know damn well why!"

"Because it's hot," Fred said quietly, biting down on the words. "An' I suppose he wanted to get off the road soon as he could."

"Since you're so dumb, I'll tell you." Alf snorted. "Mr. Leon Cardle wanted to get here in time to wash up an' eat, then grab No. 3 west for the town of Randy where he could spend the entire evenin'."

Fred turned level eyes on his fireman, but said nothing.

"An'," Alf continued heartlessly, "what's at Randy? Well, I'll tell you, by hell! There's a telegraph office. An' from four to midnight there's a young lady that works there. Her name's Libby Holt, an' she's a eyeful of queen in anybody's deck. Now, does that make a bell ring in your dumb, unfeelin' brain?"

"You better take coal," Fred said quietly.

"Aw, hell!" Alf said, and turned away with another snort of undisguised disgust.

IT WAS only a few short steps to the eating house door, but while covering that distance Fred Barton lived over his scene with Libby Holt not forty-eight hours before. He reexperienced it with a biting at his innards—a feeling of hopeless misery that was unreflected in his wide, frank countenance.

For a long time he had taken Libby Holt for granted, although, in the years they had known each other, he had never so much as offered to hold her hand or whisper romance into her ears. She was tall and fair and twenty-six. "Sharper than a whip," the men who worked with her said. And for six years the Middle District crews had considered Libby Holt as Fred Barton's "girl". That was before Cardle, the boomer, had come to the territory which, in the days of this chronicle, saw the drifters come and go by the seasons like birds on the wing. That was all before the other night . . .

"Guess what, Fred," Libby Holt had said with the frankness which was so much a part of her. And, after he had searched her eyes and saw the puzzling lights in their mystic depths, she had said, "It must be love."

Fred Barton could not forget the fear that had then assailed him. He had guessed the truth even before she told him, because he had seen Cardle several times at the telegraph office. But he had asked—

"Who?"

He had stood staring dumbly at his big hands.

"You'd never guess," Libby had teased. "He's a big handsome brute, Freddie. He's called four times. Better tell me you're glad, because—" Not finishing the sentence, she had squeezed his hand.

"I kinda hope," Fred had started, "that—that—well, I was figgerin'—"

"Crazy name he's got for such a big fellow," Libby had broken in. "He told me it was Leon, but he doesn't like it. Just as soon be called Algernon or Percival. But, Freddie, the name doesn't count."

That moment had been the hardest in big Fred Barton's life. His smile, once so ready, had seemed dead. Impulse dictated a strong and crushing seizure then and there. "Take her in your arms, you dumb fool!" a voice prompted, but his muscles wouldn't coordinate.

Slowly, then, the reason for all this had begun to sink into his brain. Libby Holt was vivid, alive. She had often expressed the hope that some day she could shake the dust of Randy from her feet—and now Cardle, the boomer, had come along and had talked glamorously to her of the places he had been, of the things he had done. He had a way of speaking softly, and perhaps his words had found some affinity in Libby's spirit.

"Why, Fred," she had said after a long pause, "aren't you glad—for me?"

"Glad? Oh, sure. Sure, Libby. That's great—only—"

"Only what?"

Why hadn't he told her then? Why hadn't he poured out what was burning him inside? He was just dumb, he told himself now, as the lunchroom door loomed closer.

He couldn't blame Libby. He didn't blame her. She was twenty-six. She knew how to think for herself. Cardle had color. He'd been around. He knew how to say what was on his mind. Cardle was sure of himself. Fred had never been anywhere but up and down the hundred and forty miles of his Kansas main line. Cardle could give Libby the avenue of escape from Randy that she sought—escape from the monotony of the tall corn empire, the endless expanse of sky and plain.

FRED was inside the lunchroom. Cardle's voice came to him in the closing sentence of some exploit in which he had once figured. Leathery throats laughed approval of Cardle's humor.

"An' there again," Cardle was saying,

"I make my point. It's the boomer who can stand the gaff in the face of emergencies. The home guard—the guy who never left the road he started on—is licked in his tracks. He don't know what to do."

Fred was barely aware of the waitress standing expectantly in front of him. Cardle's speech was sinking deeply into his brain. Cardle, the boomer—the man who did things, who went places and saw things. Fred Barton—the home guard who'd never been anywhere. Bitterly he curved his lips downward. He could see Libby Holt's point of view, all right. He, Fred Barton, had accomplished nothing. A good engineer, yes. But—

"You take the home guard," Cardle was belittling, "an' you got a man who just naturally isn't quick with his brain. That's because he's too damned set in his ways. Ready just to go along on the same old pike year after year, an' do the same things over day after day. The boomer makes tracks. He covers territory, an' when something out of the ordinary comes up, why, he's right there. He knows how to go through."

Fred mumbled his order to the waitress, and she hastened toward the kitchen. Maybe Cardle was right, for all his boasting. Fred considered. If he had been able to face an emergency and think in a pinch, he might have been capable of making Libby Holt change her mind the other night.

"There's Freddy," a lean conductor said, pointing his pipestem at the engineer. "He's a home guard. You might ask him what he thinks."

Cardle turned to where Fred sat with his coffee cup before him.

"Oh, him!" Cardle's voice was not raised, yet the inflection of the words was offensive. Cardle took a few steps toward him, leaned over, smiled.

"Quick thinker, this guy," Cardle said, addressing the group. "Yeh, quick—like a coupla snails." Then to Fred, his voice hard, "Couldn't get by with it, could you?"

"What?" Fred countered, studying the swarthy, ruggedly handsome visage.

"You know what." To the others, "Here's a home guard for you with a home guard's brains. Damn typical, I call it! Stalled all over the main line this mornin' when I overtook him, tryin' to keep me from runnin' around him. He figgered on keepin' me back of him because he couldn't, or else he wouldn't, run that leaky kettle of his fast enough to keep traffic open. Wanted me to keep from arrivin' here because he guessed that I was grabbin' No. 3 west for a little visit."

Fred shoved his coffee cup from him. He retorted:

"No. 3? You catchin' No. 3? That wasn't my worry, feller. I had tonnage—too much tonnage."

"That's as good an excuse as any," Cardle snapped. "But the fact is you got a sore spot in your system. Couldn't get anywhere yourself—an' I'm meanin' somethin' besides the railroad—an' then you decided you'd try to keep anybody else from goin' anywhere. Well, I went around you, didn't I? An' again I'm meanin' somethin' more than the railroad." Fred watched as Cardle half turned and spoke to the hard fisted brethren who faced him. "There's my point again, men. A boomer would've kept me back of him till hell froze over."

Fred got ponderously to his feet. He faced Cardle with a slow smile.

"It sounds," he said, "like you're tryin' to get personal." He advanced a step, and a cold light blazed in his eyes. "I'm on duty, an' I'm on company property, otherwise I might make you reconsider that statement, brother."

Cardle's dark eyes traveled from Fred's head to his toes. The straight lips twisted. He laughed uproariously. Finally, his features hardening, he said:

"You might! Yeh! You might's right. You'd make just two moves, big boy. One at me, an' one to the floor, an' I'm waitin' for you to start."

There was an air of tensity in the lunchroom. Fred stared at the lean

boomer. He could sock Cardle—in fact, that seemed exactly what Cardle wanted. But what good would that do? Would it raise Fred in Libby Holt's eyes? It would not.

The sun, beyond the smoke grimed windows, was pale behind the veil of massing clouds. Fred said nothing. He stood there opening and closing his hands and grinning.

"He's yellow!" Cardle whipped out the words.

Fred winced visibly. A firm hand gripped his arm. He heard Alf, the fireman, whisper hoarsely—

"Sock 'im, you damn fool."

"I'm on duty," Fred reiterated. "An' I'm on company property. I'll put that down in the book, Brother Cardle. Some day—"

The wail of a chime whistle interrupted Fred's speech. No. 3 was blowing for Ottoman yard. Fred said:

"There's your passenger train, mister. Better grab it while you're all in one piece. Otherwise you might be minus some teeth an' your normal vision, an' you wouldn't want to go courtin' that way."

Cardle's laugh was hollow, ugly. He went to the door, then turned and sneered.

"Yellow," he said. "Like the belly of a fish."

EXTRA 797 west, with its deadhead coaches, lay in the siding at Brownly. The time was 3:50. Two freight trains were thundering down from the opposite direction, swirling up dust along the main line, hurrying east ahead of the massing clouds that boiled up from the distant edge of the plain.

Alf, the fireman, lighted a cigaret, gulped air from his open window, frowned and spat into the slack coal on the deck. He said—

"I'm disgusted with you."

Fred eyed the fireman tolerantly.

"You ain't got no spine," Alf went on. "You let that guy Cardle get away with murder back there. It's no wonder he's got right over everything at Randy. You don't suppose a gal wants to waste her years with a bird that ain't goin' any place, do you?"

"You better take a look in the tank an' see after our water," Fred growled.

"You can't blame the gal any," Alf dug in. "Any woman wants class an' somethin' lively in a man. Now you take my first wife. She—"

"I don't want her," Fred retorted.

At the moment he wanted nothing except to be left completely alone. Alf's homely philosophy, he admitted, was quite true. What had he ever offered Libby Holt? Nothing but a movie now and then and a lot of senseless shop talk.

Further conversation from Alf was ended by the appearance of the second of the two eastward freight trains. The brakeman, who'd been lying on his stomach down by the switch, leaped up and opened the gate. Fred moved out to the main line, looked back until he saw his brakeman close the switch and run for the caboose. Then, acknowledging the signal from the rear, he looked ahead and mechanically went through the motions of running his train.

Chaotic thoughts assailed him. He knew that around six o'clock he would approach the little town of Randy. He would see Libby Holt on the platform, her dark hair loose at her temples, her tall form braced against the swirling air from his engine; Cardle, sitting inside perhaps, sharing the supper that the boarding house woman always sent down to the station for Libby. Fred would not reach for his whistle cord to uncork the old private signal of his approach. That was all over now.

He would, he decided, just drift by on the slightly descending grade, smile and wave cheerily at her. He mustn't show a long face about all this. He mustn't let her know anything about his own deep hurt. Perhaps, after all, he was what Cardle had said—just a plodder who would never get anywhere.

The boiling, blowing mill, on her fifty-four inch drivers, nobly, if somewhat lamely, breasted a rise and straightened to a tangent that seemed to lose itself in the murky distance. Fred felt something on his brow that wasn't perspiration, jerked himself out of his thoughts and surveyed the sky. A few drops of rain spattered on his arm rest, and it wasn't until then that he fully realized the imminence of a storm.

The clouds were banking low and spreading black. Pale shafts of yellow fire licked out in vicious darts like a serpent's tongue. The rain stopped as suddenly as it had come, and the knee-high corn in the fields trembled with nervous rustling.

"This sure oughtta cool things off," Alf bawled into Fred's ear.

Fred's nostrils picked up the odor of scorched cloth from the fireman's left leg which had, for hours, been constantly before the firebox glare. Fred turned, smiled, reached out a big hand and dropped it clumsily on Alf's wet shoulder. Then his weary fireman turned, took his pick and opened the coal gates. Fred, looking ahead again, saw a lone house loom far off in a field to the right. He looked at his watch. Within ten minutes, if the blackness lifted, Randy would rise from the breast of the land.

It was the sudden coolness he noticed first which caused his eyes to look about him hurriedly, slightly wider and startled. There was, for the moment, no stir of air save that which he made with the advance of his engine into the teeth of the impending storm. The sensation was that of running from a hot to a cold current such as a swimmer discovers in a spring-fed pool.

The rain again splattered him, caused him to draw in his head. His ears had suddenly closed up, and he cleared his throat nervously, swallowed hard to get them open again. Shooting a quick glance at Alf, he saw his fireman poised with a scoop of coal, regarding him with a startled stare.

There was no time to shout before it happened. The corn in the fields lay over under the straight blow that smashed at the engine pilot like an unseen hand, causing the train to stagger in its laborious pace. Looking ahead through the forward cab window, Fred saw one of the dirty white flags on the boiler front twisted from its standard and hurled into space.

It was then, with a paralyzing clutch at his heart, that he saw the awful twister sweep over the plain. The funnel-like black cloud dipped down in a curve like an elephant's trunk and followed a zigzag path of sudden, tearing devastation.

A cyclone!

The roar was outside and in the cab—a vast sound, a world of awful sound. Fred dropped down by the fire door, crouching beside Alf, who was trembling in terror. They clutched each other, but could utter no words. It seemed that the very breath was being drawn from them. There was a puff like the quick deflation of a toy balloon, a rending crash, a shower of glass and splinters, iron and wood. The roof of the cab went upward into the black, roaring space beyond; the cab windows exploded outward. Fred could make out the throb of the exhaust, the roll and pitch of the old kettle, incongruously clattering on its wind-ridden way.

The climax lasted but a span of seconds. To Fred the waiting was an eternity. At any moment he expected to feel the engine twisted ruthlessly from its course. He ventured a glance above his head where the sky was lightening, and he saw débris flying in the wind—pieces of planks, fence posts, uprooted corn.

PRESENTLY, when the sound began to diminish, Fred rose and ventured a glance at his track. The darkness was still heavy enough to bar any distant vision, so he steadied his pace down to a walk. He was on a swinging curve which permitted him to see the rear

end of his train, and there the caboose trailed serenely along, apparently intact. Far off to the northeast the pendulous cloud of fury was lost, and now the rain pelted into the roofless cab.

"Gawd!" Alf gasped, clinging weakly to Fred's arm. "Close! Too danged close."

His cap was gone, and the downpour streaked his sooty face, soaked his tousled hair. He recovered his scoop, shaking his head from side to side.

"Close," Fred muttered.

He tried his headlight switch, but got no responding glare from the front of his boiler. Smashed by flying débris, he decided, and strained his eyes for the light that should now be showing in the semaphore signal at Randy.

Squinting against the slanting needles of rain, he searched the dim landscape. When he saw no light he leaned forward, his jaw dropping. Then he realized that he was passing the place where the station whistle board should have been. A dim outline of something or other directly across his path a mile ahead caused him to close his throttle and pinch down his wheels, prepared to stop on a dime. He crossed the facing points of the east siding switch, saw the rails twisted up from the ties like hairpins. A sudden panic seized him, sending his left hand to his air valve.

Then he got his first glimpse of the damage at Randy, even as he brought his deadhead coaches to a halt. Directly opposite what had once been the depot, the wreckage of some freight cars and the freight shed blocked the main line where the rails still held. His heart turned over. The steel semaphore pole on the platform was bent double. The station itself was a hopeless tangle of timbers. Fred opened his whistle to announce his presence, then, calling Alf to his side, he dropped to the gravel. He hurdled planks, leaped over a dead sheep, stumbled across scattered crates and bales, and began clawing at what had been the front of the telegraph office.

Beyond the heaped mass of wood and beams, the town of Randy was, for the most part, level with the plain.

"Dead, maybe," Fred bellowed throatily to the stupefied Alf.

He was thinking of Libby Holt, and the panic in his heart was terrifying. From the dark area beyond the depot Fred heard the wails of women, the shouting of men, the shrill cries of children.

"Bring a light, Alf. Get my torch. Quick. Maybe—maybe there's a chance she's still—"

The conductor came running with a lantern. The two brakemen appeared, their yellow lanterns casting eery shadows about their legs. Fred called to them to help him as he clawed at the wreckage. Men from the village swarmed over the platform assisting screaming women.

"Help! We gotta have help!" The cry was hoarse from a strained throat. Somebody was tugging at Fred's arm.

"It's my daughter," some one else cried, hysterically. "She's under the kitchen roof, an' the bones is stickin' outta her leg. I can't get her out."

"Oh, good God!" another shrieked. "My wife's buried in the house. She run for the house when she seen it comin' an' my kids was in there with her."

"My mother," came a woman's voice. "I want to send a message to my mother—" The voice broke off in an agonizing sob.

Fred Barton, hatless in the driving rain, whirled and took the conductor's lantern. He towered head and shoulders above the growing mob of panic stricken people, who had just lived through heart-rending moments of an awful hell. Fred Barton, the home guard who had never been credited with thinking fast in his life, bellowed out:

"Keep your heads, you! We'll get you fixed up." Then he pulled his conductor over to him. "Mack," he said, "we better get those coaches open. Throw the seats together. Soon's we can find somebody that can think

straight for a minute we can try to get hold of them that's hurt. Get 'em in those coaches an' get 'em back to Brownly where they got a hospital. Gimme a hand, Mack, with the coaches."

"Givin' it to you right now," the conductor responded crisply. "Here! I'll pick me some of these men that ain't hurt, an' we'll get started."

Alf came up with the flickering torch from the engine, and Fred grabbed three husky, although somewhat shaken, survivors, and pressed them into service.

"We'll start here," he shouted through the streaking rain. The water was running down his back; his gloves were soaked through, the leather facings slippery. "We'll see if anybody under here's alive. Then we'll make tracks fast."

Driving, goading his helpers and putting his own brawn to the task, with Alf by his side, Fred tore away at the wreckage of the depot. Slowly they succeeded in clearing what seemed to be part of the front wall, and presently effected a tunnel through which one could crawl. Fred placed the torch on the ground, dropped to his knees and began to work his way into the dark hole beneath the piled timbers.

His hands were groping out in front of him when suddenly something smashed against him, sprawling him on his back. A heavy foot thudded into his stomach, a heel scraped over his chin, and a dark hulk got between him and the light, scurrying out on all fours like a frightened rat.

"Hey!" Fred shouted. "What—"

Whatever else he had intended to say died in his throat. In the glare of the torch he saw a dark, drawn face, with staring eyes. It was Cardle the boomer. Rage blinded Fred for the moment, and then he managed to turn around to give chase to the lean figure that was already emerging from the station wreckage.

Fred Barton, after clearing the cramping tunnel, displayed speed on his feet. He overtook the man in a dozen quick strides and whirled him around. The crowd closed in on them.

"Where—where is she?" Fred demanded. "Is—is she——"

"Lemme out of this," Cardle bawled, and his voice was savage with fear. "Lemme out, I tell you! Lemme out!" The man wrenched free of Fred's grip, spun about and tried to force his way through the crowd.

Fred, filled with a vast disgust, recaptured the man's arm and twisted it.

"Listen, you!"

A blow to the mouth, with the frenzy of a madman behind it, stopped Fred's speech. He saw, momentarily, a face charged with hate, gleaming in the rain. He felt a sharp nausea steal over him. Again he seized Cardle and shook him roughly.

"Is Libby in there?" Fred shouted. "Get the yellow streak outta your back, Cardle. Libby—"

Again a blow lashed out at his mouth, and Cardle, free of his restraining clutch, broke into the crowd. Fred took three steps after him, fiercely turned him around and looked into his drawn visage.

"An' you're the dog that—that she'd —that called *me* yellow!"

Rage blinded him. His right fist came up and took Cardle on the chin. The boomer's knees caved in and he went down in a heap on the platform.

"Alf," said Fred, breathing heavily, "look after the skunk. He—he'll likely need a doctor. I'm goin' back in the tangle under that depot."

FRED groped his way into the hole, found a recess left by the stalwart legs of the telegraph table, which had not collapsed. Presently his fingers touched Libby's arm. He found her face. His fingers felt the pulse at her temples, detecting the flutter of life there. Tenderly, yet clumsily, he worked around until he could get her free. Then he struggled out with her.

"Take her, Alf," he called to his fire-

man. "When we can find a doctor, I'll tell him to give her a look. Better get her in one of them coaches out of the rain."

The conductor, at this point, came back to report that the coaches were ready.

"Plant the brakemen handy on the platform to help load the wounded," Fred ordered, "an' then come with me. We'll see what all we can work out."

With his conductor and a group of the town's survivors, Fred Barton, the ponderous home guard, plunged into the center of the town where the devastation was complete. In what was left of the Baptist church, the town's two doctors had already made a move to set up an emergency hospital. Fred conferred with them briefly.

"We'll get cars, if we can find any, an' take 'em down to my train. We can handle a thousand in a pinch, an' then we can back to Brownly with 'em. I'll take me a crew, an' the conductor'll take some men, an' we'll do the best we can."

The speed of the rescue work was amazing after Fred Barton had it organized. He threw gangs over the entire village. Under his leadership the panic stricken workers settled down to the grim task. Débris had to be lifted, pulled away wherever there was the slightest possibility that a victim had been trapped. The hardest job was to handle the children, who were crying and pleading for missing fathers and mothers.

Enough automobiles were found in running order to provide quick ambulance service to the depot. And as soon as some of the drivers could be spared, Fred sent them on scouting expeditions into the nearby country to see if aid was needed there.

Within the second hour, when the strain had eased somewhat, he thought of Libby and rode on the running board of a car to the depot to see how she was.

"Ask her," Alf growled. "Don't ask me."

"You mean she's come to already?"

"She's gone off playin' nurse somewheres. She wouldn't stay put. Said she only had a little headache. She asked about little Leon."

Fred smiled grimly. He returned to the scene of his activities, and it wasn't until about nine o'clock that he saw Libby. She was mustering some children into the shelter afforded by the local hotel dining room, the only part of the building that was still standing. Their eyes met for a moment. He tried to smile at her, but she didn't smile back.

Shortly before ten the last of the wounded had been accounted for. Three hundred and eighty men, women and children were in the coaches. Some with scratches, some hopelessly maimed and quieted only by the use of drugs. Seventeen lay dead in the Baptist church.

Fred rode down with the last truckload and found a locomotive headlight gleaming at the rear of his own train. A man came out of the shadows, grasped his hand.

"I don't need to tell you, Fred," the division superintendent said huskily, "uh—how much we're thanking you for what you been doing here. I—"

"Me? I haven't been doin' anything that—"

"Headwork, Fred. Fast an' orderly thinking. I was at Ottoman when that twister hit this country, and when we didn't hear from you after an hour or so, I got me an engine and came up. You ready to back 'em to Brownly now? Good. My engine's coupled in on you. We'll give you a lift."

Alf was getting the fire in shape when Fred climbed to his roofless cab. The firedoor was open, the red glow reflecting in the slanting rain that sizzled on the rim of the stoke hole.

"You all right, Alf?" Fred asked wearily, sinking to his sodden cushion.

"How the hell can a man be all right when he ain't got a roof over his head?" Alf retorted.

"Where—where's Cardle?"

"Back in the coaches, needin' a doctor danged bad."

"Did I hurt him much?"

"Aw, hell," Alf said, as he clanged his scoop on the door rim.

A lantern near the rear of the train swung in a series of wide circles. Fred gave his whistle three blasts, put the engine in reverse, cracked his throttle.

The rescue train eased to a halt at the Brownly depot where the ambulances were backed up to the platform. Fred Barton brought his head into the cab, pulled off his gloves and looked over to where his fireman should have been. Seeing the cab on that side empty, Fred called out for Alf but received no answer. Finally he rose from his cushion, dropped to the ground and leaned against the grab-rail at the steps. Along the platform he saw hurried activity as the wounded were being unloaded. No use getting into that now. His job was finished. Slowly he took a wad of cotton waste from his hip pocket and began to wipe off his big hands.

Libby was at his side before he realized it. He was first conscious of the sober lights in her eyes as she gazed up at him with lips slightly parted. Her lower lip trembled as her hand closed over his.

She seemed to be trying to speak. A sob shook her tall frame, she lowered her head; and before he knew what it was all about, she was crying silently, her head pillowed on his soaked chest. He looked upon her wonderingly and put one big arm across her shoulders.

"Hey, there, girl," he blurted, "you —you mustn't—"

"Fred," she said presently, her eyes meeting his. "Fred, tell me it's all right. Tell me—"

"Sure. What's all right?" He was puzzled now, but he was happy.

"Maybe—maybe, Fred, a woman—it's woman's nature to be a fool. Maybe you can sort of forgive."

"Forgive?"

"Don't take your arm away, Freddie. I need it there. And—and forgive is what I mean. You know. About—about Cardle, and the way I hurt you. I must've been blind, fascinated by his talk. But Alf—well, Alf told me some things. I think I understand Cardle now."

And Alf, at the mention of his name, grinned to himself up there in the shadows on the coal pile where he had discreetly withdrawn. Alf mumbled under his breath—

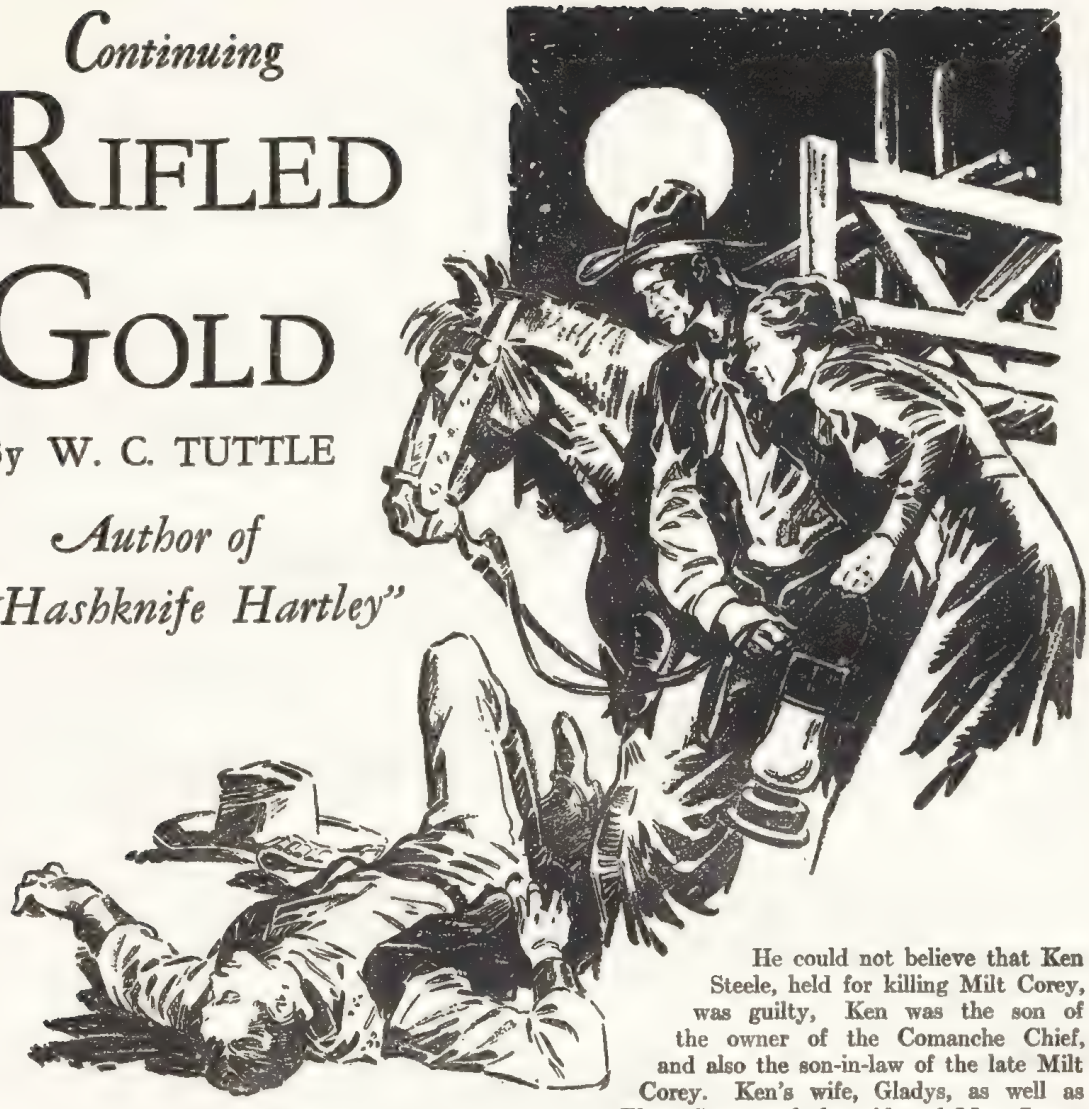
"Aw, hell."

Continuing

RIFLED GOLD

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Hashknife Hartley"



He could not believe that Ken Steele, held for killing Milt Corey, was guilty, Ken was the son of the owner of the Comanche Chief, and also the son-in-law of the late Milt Corey. Ken's wife, Gladys, as well as Elene Corey and the widowed Mrs. Corey, were convinced of Ken's innocence. Yet Hashknife had to admit that circumstantial evidence was strong against Ken.

Assisted by Sleepy, Hashknife quietly gathered information. Keeping their profession a secret was no mistake. Already a conspicuous young tenderfoot, who was thought to be a detective, had been shot at several times, luckily escaping with minor wounds. His name was Van Avery, but Hashknife laughingly dubbed him the Arizona Target.

Hashknife knew it was useless to confide in Sheriff Banty Brayton and Deputy Handsome Hartwig. These law officers, unable to cope with the puzzling crimes in their county, were busy detecting detectives. They took it for granted that Van Avery was a secret investigator because he seemed too hardboiled to be a genuine Eastern tenderfoot when he held up Steve McCord of the X8X outfit and collected his winnings after a crooked poker game.

So, without consulting the sheriff, Hashknife

The Story Thus Far:

AT THE urgent request of the Cattlemen's Association Hashknife Hartley went to Painted Wells, Arizona, to investigate the theft of gold from the Comanche Chief mine. He was a range detective of wide reputation, but no one in Painted Wells recognized him or his partner, Sleepy Stevens. They took a room at a hotel, but soon moved out of town and worked as cowboys on the Corey ranch —for the ranch seemed to be the hub of the mysteries surrounding Hashknife's assignment.

Although a previous detective from the Association had been assassinated, and the Comanche Chief mine foreman shot, Hashknife felt that the crime demanding his immediate attention was the murder of Milt Corey, who had been killed and robbed of ten thousand dollars which he had borrowed from Ed Ault, local saloon owner, to pay off the mortgage on his ranch. Hashknife suspected that the successive crimes were all related, and that Corey's murderer was the gold thief.

played a long hand. He met Ed Ault, who had lent the ten thousand dollars to Milt Corey, but, before he had an opportunity to question him, Ault left town, saying he was making a visit to Phoenix. Then Hashknife loafed in Nelson's hardware store which, like Ault's saloon, was a center of gossip. Rick Nelson, as the local assayer, had once tricked Milt Corey, after which the two men had been bitter enemies.

Avoiding the Comanche Chief mine in order that no undue curiosity should betray his errand in connection with it, Hashknife visited Ken Steele in the local jail. He came away to report to the Corey womenfolk, who looked on him as a sort of guardian; but he was quickly diverted by a new problem.

Van Avery had disappeared. Interest in the strange Easterner was suddenly heightened. He had not taken the stage. His hat, boots, chaps, belt and empty holster were in his hotel room. But Van Avery was nowhere.

"I'll see what I can do toward finding him," the sheriff told Hashknife, "but I'm afraid they got him this time. He sure must have been the Cattlemen's Association detective that was rumored to be in Painted Wells."

ELENE visited Ken for a few minutes, then they all went back to the ranch. Sleepy wanted to search for Van Avery, but he admitted that he didn't know just where to look.

About midafternoon the sheriff rode out to the ranch. He was going to Red Hill and wondered whether Hashknife wanted to ride down with him. Hashknife assented.

Mrs. Corey told the sheriff about Van Avery's bringing a load of provisions out to them.

"I know he did, Mrs. Corey; and that's one reason I'm goin' to try and find him. There ain't many fellers like that in the world, and we can't afford to lose what we've got. He ain't very bright, but he's shore good hearted. We might pick up some trace of him in Red Hill, and that's why I want Hartley to go along. You know—" confidentially— "there's a feller that ain't dumb."

"I think Mr. Hartley is one of God's gentlemen," said Mrs. Corey.

"Well, I dunno about that. But he's plenty smart."

The long, dusty ride was without incident. They did not hurry, and it was supper time when they reached Red Hill. At a little restaurant they met Steve McCord, owner of the X8X outfit at Porcupine, and Brad Thatcher, one of McCord's cowboys. McCord was a big, hard faced cattleman, slightly gray, with cold blue eyes and a square chin. Brad Thatcher was below medium height, wiry, thin faced, possibly thirty years of age. One eye was slightly off line, which gave him a squinting expression.

The sheriff knew them both very well. It developed that McCord was the one who had sent the telegram about Van Avery's holding up the poker game. Hashknife noticed that McCord did not appreciate the sheriff's explanation as to why he did not catch the holdup man.

"That's all right, Banty," said McCord. "We happen to know you didn't try very hard."

The big sheriff laughed at McCord.

"You ort to be glad I didn't, Steve. Imagine you and your gang on the witness stand, testifyin' that this tenderfoot held you up and took his money back, because you tried to higrade him out of a pot."

Steve's retort was unprintable. He hammered on the table and swore no one stole that card.

"Yeah, and then one of you tried to shoot this kid through a car winder," accused the sheriff.

"He told you that, did he?"

"He didn't need to," said Hashknife. "I was on that car."

"Yeah?" McCord sized Hashknife up closely. "You was, eh?"

"Nothin' wrong about that, is there?"

"What's use arguin' about ancient hist'ry?" interrupted Thatcher.

"And if it's any news to you," said the sheriff, "that kid has disappeared."

"He has, eh?" grunted McCord, a glint of amusement in his eyes. "If it's any news to me, eh? I don't like that remark, Brayton. You speak as though I had somethin' to do with him disappearin'."

Banty Brayton's jaw jutted a trifle as he leaned across the table, shoving the dishes aside.

"Lemme tell you somethin', Steve. One of your men shot at this kid through a car winder. The next day the stage was held up, and somebody shot this kid down. They thought they had killed him, and they took two thousand dollars off him. A few nights ago some dirty murderer shot through the dinin' room winder of the Diamond C ranch-house with a .45-70 rifle, tryin' to kill the kid.

"I'm not accusin' anybody, you understand; but the trouble started in Porcupine. Nobody in Red Hill or Painted Wells ever had any trouble with the kid. There shore wasn't any reason for shootin' him down at the holdup, 'cause the kid didn't have any gun and he never made any move as though he had a gun. That shot through the ranch-house winder was a deliberate attempt to murder him."

"You ain't tryin' to put the deadwood on me, are you?" asked Steve coldly. "As a matter of fact, you don't know that me or one of my men shot through that car window. You're jist guessin', Banty."

"Did he have trouble with anybody else in Porcupine?"

"I don't know a damn thing about him. But I'll tell you this much, Brayton; don't start accusin' me and my gang, until you get a lot more evidence than you've got now."

"Like I said at first, I'm not accusin' you nor anybody else," said the sheriff calmly. "I jist merely wanted you to know that the kid is missin'; and if you should happen to run across him, you might see that he gits back to Painted Wells all right."

"Is Painted Wells so damn hard up for men that you crave this soft boiled aig?" asked Thatcher sarcastically.

"Keep out of it, Brad," advised McCord.

"You fellers play a pretty stiff game at Porcupine, don'tcha?" asked Hashknife. "These here thousand-dollar pots look kinda heavy for a cowtown game."

"You might come over and turn a few cards sometime," suggested McCord. "We allus aim to please our visitors."

"Yeah, I might," said Hashknife seriously. "I dunno jist what I'd use for money, but I might come, anyway. I like to see a big game, even if I ain't got money enough to buy a stack of whites."

The sheriff laughed as he attacked his meal.

"Don't let 'em git you down, Hashknife," he said. "They play a four-bits-a-stack game, table stakes, and howl like a coyote if you quit two dollars winner. I know 'em well."

"You ain't feelin' good tonight, are you, Banty?" asked McCord. "You might at least say somethin' good about Porcupine."

"Porcupine's all right; all they need is a better class of people."

"That's all hell needs," grunted Hashknife.

McCord paid for his and Thatcher's meal and stopped in the doorway as he left.

"Come over and see us sometime," he said. "We'll show you a good time."

"Thank you," replied the sheriff, his mouth full of food. "I've been over there."

"Anyway, we almost made 'em mad," chuckled the sheriff after the two men had gone.

"Was that your idea?" asked Hashknife.

"I dunno. McCord allus rubs me the wrong way, and I thought I had a chance to hand some of it back to him. If I had a hunch that the kid was over at Porcupine I'd go over there in a minute."

Hashknife nodded thoughtfully.

"So would I. Brayton, do you think for a minute that McCord and his gang are mixed up in these attempts to kill Van Avery?"

"Why would they be? All he done was take back some money they tried to steal from him. McCord don't strike me as a feller that would pull off a sneakin' murder jist because a feller de-

fended his own. How does he strike you, Hashknife?"

"Plenty forked."

After their supper, Hashknife left the sheriff at the saloon, talking with the bartender, and went up to the depot. The agent did not remember selling a ticket to any one of Van Avery's description. He hadn't sold any tickets to strangers during the past month.

"Do you know Ed Ault?" asked Hashknife.

"Sure, I know him. He bought a ticket to Phoenix a few days ago."

Hashknife went back to the saloon and joined the sheriff. Their trip had netted them nothing, except to convince them that Van Avery, alive or dead, was still in the county.

AS THEY rode back toward Painted Wells, Hashknife asked the sheriff if Handsome had told him what Ken Steele had explained about some one taking his gun away the night before the murder.

"Yeah, I heard about that," said the sheriff.

"Didja try to find out who was drinkin' with Ken that night?"

"I ain't tried yet."

"Try it. Find the man who took that gun, and we'll have a darned good chance to put the deadwood on somebody."

"Are you turnin' detective?" queried the sheriff.

"Don't forget that Silver Steele will give five thousand dollars for proof that Ken didn't kill Corey."

"I'm afraid nobody will ever collect that money, Hashknife. That gun will convict Ken as sure as the devil. No jury will believe his story."

"Prob'ly not. How far from the body did you find the gun?"

"Oh, mebbe fifteen, twenty feet, layin' in some weeds."

"Are you sure it is Ken's gun?"

"Absolutely. Why, it's got his initials on it."

Hashknife laughed softly.

"What's funny about it?" demanded the sheriff.

"Why did he throw his gun away?"

"Why, I dunno. It was all over blood."

"Could have been washed, couldn't it?"

"Shore, but—"

"Brayton, use what little sense God gave you. Would any halfway intelligent person commit murder with a marked gun and throw the gun away near the body?"

"He admits he was drunk."

"He admits he was sick. That gun was planted there to throw suspicion on Ken. Brayton, the murderer was in Painted Wells, and he saw Ken leave town ahead of Milt Corey. Who he was, I don't know. He had the gun which was taken away from Ken. Very likely he would have killed Milt Corey anyway, but this was a dandy chance to shift suspicion to Ken. He murdered Corey, threw the gun aside where you'd find it, and pulled out with the ten thousand dollars."

Brayton rode along silently for quite awhile.

"I reckon the drinks are on Silver Steele," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Thinkin' that young Van Avery was the detective."

"All right, Brayton; but we'll keep on thinkin' Van Avery is the detective until we know better."

"Suits me jist right, Hashknife."

WHEN Silver Steele retained Judge William Frazer to defend his son he secured the services of a criminal lawyer who would fight to the last ditch. It would be two weeks until the next term of court, which was little enough time to prepare a defense. The judge arrived in Painted Wells two days after Hashknife and the sheriff had been to Red Hill. He knew nothing about the case, but it did not require much time for him to get an idea of things. He had a

talk with Ken, and afterward talked with Ed Ault, who had come back from his trip a day ahead of the judge's arrival.

The judge intimated that he wanted to talk with Mrs. Corey. Ault offered to take him out to the ranch, which arrangement was acceptable to the judge. Elene had decided to ride with Hashknife and Sleepy that day, and they were away from the ranch. Gladys saw Ault with the stranger, and refused to come downstairs; so Ault twiddled his thumbs alone on the porch while the judge talked with Mrs. Corey in the ranch-house.

It was after the interview, while Mrs. Corey was talking with the judge and Ault on the porch, that Ault mentioned the fact that it was kind of Hartley and Stevens to help them out.

"I don't know what I would have done without them," said the old lady. "They are just doing everything for us. Even in Arizona, I didn't know there were men like those two. Hashknife Hartley is—"

"Pardon me," interrupted the judge. "Did you say Hashknife Hartley, Mrs. Corey?"

"Yes."

"Well, well!" exclaimed the judge softly. "Hashknife Hartley!"

"Do you know him?" asked Ault curiously.

"Not personally. Hmmm!"

"Anything wrong about him?" asked Ault.

"Wrong?" The judge chuckled. "Not that I have ever heard, Mr. Ault. In fact, it is just the reverse. Mrs. Corey, I wish you would have him get in touch with me. Perhaps he has never heard of me. Our paths have never crossed, but we have mutual friends."

"I shall be glad to tell him," said Mrs. Corey.

"Thank you kindly, madam; it is a favor to me."

Ault was curious. Why would this lawyer want to see Hashknife Hartley? He waited until they were nearly back to Painted Wells before he asked any questions, and he led up to them with—

"Hartley is quite a character, Judge."

"Character? Oh, yes, I suppose he is. Rather wonderful character."

"I didn't think he was an ordinary cowpuncher."

"No, I'd say he was rather extraordinary. How long has he been here?"

"Oh, not very long. Says he's lookin' over range land for some packin' house in the east."

"Ummm, yes, I suppose he is. Wasn't here at the time of Corey's death, was he?"

"No. He came here at the same time Elene Corey came home. Same train, I reckon."

The judge was silent for awhile. Suddenly he snapped the question—

"Did you know Payzant?"

"Not by that name," replied Ault. "We knew him as Jack Cherry."

"I see. Queer situation here. Sheriff told me about this Van Avery, supposedly a detective. Devil of a mess."

"Think you can build up a defense for Ken Steele?" asked Ault.

"Mr. Ault, the best defense in the world is to prove that somebody else committed the crime."

"I'm afraid you've got a job on your hands, Judge." Ault laughed.

"Job? Oh, certainly. Expected a job. Feel better about it now."

"With Hashknife Hartley in the country, eh?" queried Ault.

"You folks need rain out here. Country is awful dry."

MRS. COREY told Hashknife about the judge and Ed Ault's being out there, and that the judge wanted to see him. She told of the conversation on the porch, and of the judge's surprise at knowing who was working on the ranch. Elene was watching the expression on Hashknife's face; after her mother had gone in the house she went to him.

"What is wrong?" she asked softly.

Hashknife looked at her and shook his head.

"Everythin' is all right, Elene," he said.

"You don't know this Judge Frazer?"

"I never heard of him. Shucks, there's lots of folks I never heard about."

"Can his knowing you hurt you in any way?"

"I hope not."

"Won't you tell me what it means, Hashknife? You know we'd do anything in the world for you and Sleepy."

"Well, bless your heart." Hashknife smiled. "It's all right. We ain't done anythin' wrong. This is jist one time when we should have changed our names, tha's all."

"You didn't want the judge to know who you are?"

Hashknife was silent for several minutes. Finally he asked—

"Elene, would you trust Ed Ault?"

"I would not."

"He heard what was said, and he prob'ly heard more from the lawyer. But don't worry about us. I better go and wash my face."

"Oh, I'm so sorry mother mentioned your name."

"Keep smilin'. Everythin' is goin' great. As Sleepy would say, 'I'm afraid everythin' is goin' to be all right.' "

Hashknife found Sleepy down at the corral and told him what had been said. Sleepy screwed up his face seriously and whistled through his teeth.

"Makes it kinda tough," he said. "From now on we better look jist a little out. It all depends on how open-mouthed that lawyer got about us on the way back to town. I don't like Ault. He's smooth, like a snake. Mebbe he's all right, though."

"Mebbe. Somebody around here is all wrong, and it might not be Ault. But you can't keep a man from talkin'."

"You shore can't. Are you goin' in to see the judge?"

"Be a good thing, I suppose. If the beans ain't all spilled, we might save a few."

"Oh, well." Sleepy took off his hat and mopped his brow with his sleeve. "I'm jist scared to death that everythin' is goin' to be all right."

CHAPTER VI

HASHKNIFE PROSPECTS

HASHKNIFE said no more about going in to see the lawyer until after dark that night, when he and Sleepy went down to the stable, saddled their horses and rode into the hills. They were both afraid that the traveled roads were dangerous for them now, and they were taking no chances.

They tied their horses to a fence behind the hotel and went around to the door. It was a few minutes past nine o'clock, but the street was deserted. They went into the hotel and found the proprietor tilted back in a chair behind his little counter, reading a paperback novel.

"Well, glad to see you back, boys." He smiled genially. "How's everythin'?"

"Goin' along fine," said Hashknife. "I reckon Judge Frazer is stoppin' here, ain't he?"

"Oh, yeah; he's in No. 10. Pretty nice sort of a feller, he is."

"Is he in his room now?"

"Must be. Come in after supper and said he had a lot of writin' to do; so I give him a extra lamp. Didja want to see him?"

"He wanted to see us," replied Hashknife.

"Well, I reckon it's all right. Want me to take you up?"

"We can find No. 10."

"Shore—go ahead."

The narrow hallway was dark, but there was light shining from under the door of No. 10. Hashknife knocked softly. There was no reply and no sound from any one in the room. Another knock failed to elicit a reply.

"Must have gone out and left his lamp burnin'," said Sleepy.

Hashknife turned the knob. The door opened. Both lamps were burning, and sprawled on the floor, his head and

shoulders under the bed, was Judge Frazer. There was blood on the bed, a splatter of it across the little table and on some sheets of writing paper.

Hashknife quickly turned the man over. His head and shoulders were a mass of gore, and it looked as though his head had been battered to a pulp, but he was still alive.

"Get the sheriff and have him find the doctor as quick as you can, Sleepy," ordered Hashknife.

Sleepy ran down the stairs, much to the amazement of the old man at the desk; and within ten minutes the sheriff, deputy and Dr. Smedley were there, together with the proprietor. No one else knew what had happened.

"Be a job to save him," declared the doctor. "Get some clean bedding; we'll keep him here. No use moving him. Get me a lot of hot water."

"Think you can save him?" asked Hashknife.

"Make a try at it," panted the doctor. "Damn bad beating they gave him. Looks as though they tried to hammer his head off. What's this country coming to, anyway? Where's that hot water?"

THE sheriff, grim of face, drew Hashknife out into the hallway. He knew that Judge Frazer had been retained to defend Ken, but he did not know anything further. They walked to the end of the hallway, where some stairs led down to the rear of the building near the kitchen entrance.

Hashknife told of the judge's visit at the ranch with Ault, adding that the judge had left word that he wanted Hashknife to come to see him.

"We came to see what he wanted, and you see what we found," said Hashknife.

"Why did he want to see you, Hashknife?"

"He didn't say. He told Mrs. Corey that me and him had mutual friends, and he wanted to see me."

There was moonlight, and from where they stood it was easy to see their two horses tied to the old fence.

"Your broncs?" asked the sheriff.

"Yeah."

"How'd you come to tie 'em out there?"

"We came in through the hills and didn't bother to ride around to the street."

"Through the hills? You mean you didn't come on the road?"

"The road don't come through the hills, does it?"

The sheriff was silent for several moments. Then—

"I'm gettin' scared too."

They walked back, and the sheriff questioned the hotel keeper. No one had gone through the office since the judge came in. He was sure of that. No, he had not heard any noises. Leaving Handsome to assist the doctor, Hashknife, Sleepy and the sheriff went over to the Yucca Saloon. The usual crowd was there. Ed Ault was running a roulette wheel. He nodded to the three of them.

"Not much of a crowd tonight," said Hashknife to the bartender as he poured their drinks.

"Jist average," replied the drink dispenser. "The closing down of the Comanche Chief sure slowed up business for this place. I wonder if there's any chance of Steele's startin' it up again."

"Not for awhile," replied the sheriff. "I notice that Steele's lawyer is here gettin' ready to defend Ken."

"Yes, he was here this afternoon. Looks plenty smart, and they say he's great on murder cases."

"That's his reputation." The sheriff nodded.

"Been any of the boys over from Porcupine?" asked Hashknife.

"McCord and Ike Berry was here. Come over to get some stuff from Nelson, I guess. They left about four o'clock."

"That was after Ault and the lawyer got back from the Diamond C, wasn't

it?"

"I'm not sure. Yeah, I think it was. You might ask Ault."

They finished their drinks and left the place, going back to the hotel where the doctor had patched up the lawyer as well as he could.

"Here's his card and address, Banty," said the doctor. "You better wire his family."

"Pretty bad, eh?"

"He's about as bad as they ever get, and still be alive. I'll stay with him tonight."

Hashknife and Sleepy slipped back to their horses and rode home in the moonlight, but not on the road.

"Why did they try to kill him?" asked Sleepy. "He wasn't no detective; he was jist a lawyer. Hashknife, I don't savvy it at all."

"Gallows bait, Sleepy. They'll kill anybody who might put the deadwood on them. They can't quit now. The only life that means anythin' now is their own. Whoever they are, they killed Milt Corey. I don't know what Frazer knew, but he must have known somethin'—and he was foolish enough to talk."

"Yeah, and if we get out of this with a whole skin, I'll shore give three cheers," said Sleepy. "I wonder what they done to poor Blondy Van Avery."

They inspected the ranch buildings cautiously before stabling their horses. The Corey family were still waiting up for them, and they listened with amazement to the story of what had happened to the old lawyer.

None of them could understand why the lawyer should have been the object of a murderous attack; but as Sleepy and Hashknife were starting out to the bunkhouse, Elene said to Hashknife—

"Could it have been because he knew you?"

Hashknife shook his head thoughtfully.

"I'd hate to think that, Elene. You see, I don't know who Frazer talked with or what he might have said. Unless he lives and saves his memory, we prob'ly never will know. Jist knowin' me hadn't ought to be cause for anybody tryin' to kill him."

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way, Hashknife."

"I know what you meant," he said, patting her on the shoulder. "Don't worry."

"You'll be careful, won't you?"

"Me? I'm the most careful person you ever met. If I hadn't been, I'd have been killed off a long time ago."

"There is nothing yet about Van Avery?"

Hashknife shook his head sadly.

"Not a thing. You liked that kid."

"We all liked him, Hashknife. He was different, but—"

"I know; I like 'em different myself. Good night."

EARLY the following morning the sheriff rode out to the ranch.

Frazer was still alive. The sheriff said he himself was up half the night answering telegrams and arguing with the stage station agent, who was also the telegraph operator.

"They're sendin' a expert surgeon from Phoenix," said the sheriff. "All I hope is that there's somethin' to work on after he gits here. Frazer is shore in damn bad shape. After you left last night I got to pokin' around in his room. It looked to me as though he had been writin' a letter when they interrupted him.

"Anyway, the bottle of ink was spilled all over some papers, and the papers was on the floor. Here's one that looks like part of a letter, but most of it was so soaked with ink you couldn't possibly read it."

He handed Hashknife part of a page of notepaper, the edges gummed with ink. The top and bottom of the letter were missing, having been soaked to pulp by the ink and pulled off; so there was no chance to discover to whom it was written. It read:

. . . the name of that expert safecracker you sent up for five years, about six years ago? I'm not so clear on the sentence. Unless I am mistaken, Evans and Crowninshield defended him. Perhaps you will remember him, because he nearly made his escape after his conviction. Seems to me his name was Fillmore. I'm asking, because there . . .

And there the letter ended. Hashknife rubbed his chin and looked at the sheriff.

"Almost," he said sadly. "Damn that ink!"

"Almost what?" asked the sheriff blankly.

"Almost a chance to put our finger on the man who blew that safe at the Comanche Chief. Banty, that job was done by an expert."

"Yeah? What makes you think it was?"

"No inexperienced man could do it. The man who blew that safe knew to a drop how much nitroglycerin it took to open the door. He knew where to put it and how to shoot it off."

"I imagine you're right, Hashknife. Who do you reckon loaded that gun for Ryan?"

"Who knows?"

"Well, damn it, I want to know!" snorted the sheriff. "I tell you, this is gettin' on my nerves. Who killed Payzant? Who killed Ryan? Who got away with Van Avery? Who tried to murder Frazer? I asked Handsome this mornin' what in hell we're goin' to do, and he said we might set down and keep tally. Damn fool makes me mad."

Hashknife frowned.

"I wish I could help you, Banty; but I'm jist a cowpuncher."

Hashknife felt sorry for the sheriff. Banty Brayton was as honest as a dollar, and very conscientious; but his mind ran in a single track. Perhaps at this time it ran on no track at all.

"Didja find out who was with Ken Steele the night before the murder?" asked Hashknife.

"No, I didn't," admitted the sheriff. "I been a-layin' off to do that."

"You ought to wait awhile longer and mebbe they'll tell it to their grandchildren."

"I know—" sadly. "Hell, I'm all muddled. Can't remember what to do next. I'll let you know what I find out."

"I'm not your superior officer. Why tell me? Go ahead and work it out for yourself."

"Why, I thought you wanted to know."

"Go ahead. You find out, tell me who it was, and mebbe we'll work out somethin'. The right answer might git you elected again, Banty."

"Nothin' will ever git me elected agin, Hashknife. I ain't goin' to quit as long as there's any leather left to pull; but I'm goin' to be damn sure what I climb on to next time."

After the sheriff had gone back to town Hashknife sat down and tried to puzzle out a few things. There was no doubt in his mind that the lawyer had recognized some one in Painted Wells who greatly resembled an ex-safecracker. In fact, it must have been more than a resemblance, if the suspect sneaked into the lawyer's room and attempted to murder him. The question was—who might that man be?

Hashknife was satisfied that Van Avery had been mistaken for a detective, and it was very evident that this bad bunch would not hesitate to murder any detective suspect. Ryan's murder was no mystery. He had made an attempt to protect those golden ingots. Of course, his gun had been rendered useless by some one closely connected with the company, working with the bad bunch.

But Hashknife's reflections always drifted back to Payzant, the first victim of the gang. No doubt Payzant was familiar with his job. He impersonated a lone prospector and even went to the trouble of locating property. Hashknife could find no evidence that Payzant had ever been around the Comanche Chief; and it seemed to Hashknife that Payzant knew the main evidence was not to be found there.

He wondered if Payzant had been killed at Rick Nelson's prospect hole; or had he been carried there and thrown into the hole, after being struck over the head? Was there any significance to his being left there?

Hashknife knew little about mines or minerals, but an irresistible hunch seemed to urge him to investigate that spot thoroughly.

He saddled his horse, told Sleepy to stay at the ranch, then rode over to the north line fence. He found Milt Corey's location notices, looked over his assessment work and examined the character of the rock. The rock meant nothing to Hashknife, so his examination of it was brief.

He did examine the location notice, and observed that the claims ran only as far north as the fence line. Apparently Corey's idea was merely to prevent Nelson from locating on the Diamond C property.

There was no location notice near the hole where Payzant's body had been found; but after considerable search Hashknife found it farther to the north. Checking up the approximate length of the claim, Hashknife decided that it ran to Corey's line fence. That is, Nelson's and Milt Corey's claims joined at the fence.

At Nelson's location, which was marked as "point of discovery," Nelson had hardly scratched the ground. Hashknife went back to the prospect hole, where he sat down and smoked a cigaret. The hole was too deep for him to get down without the aid of a ladder or a rope. As far as he could see there was no use going down there. The rock was all a dark brown, semi-decomposed stuff.

Hashknife picked up a small piece and broke it against another piece of rock. He knew nothing about gold-bearing ores, but he put a small piece of the broken rock in his pocket and went back to the ranch, where he was rather surprised to find Silver Steele on the shady porch engaged in conversation with Mrs. Corey.

MRS. COREY called to Hashknife, who joined them, shaking hands with Steele.

"It has been years and years since Mr. Steele was here," said the little old lady.

"A long, long time," admitted Steele. "Poor Milt hated me. From his viewpoint, I guess he had a right to hate me. I'll admit I took advantage of him, but at that time it looked like business. Rick Nelson swears he made an accurate assay of the samples Milt gave him. Anyway, after Milt gave up the prospect, Rick came to me and asked me how much I would give him for some sure-fire information on a quartz mine. He said it was free milling stuff, but he didn't have the money to develop it.

"He wanted ten thousand dollars, but I laughed at him. We finally made a deal, in which I was to give him half of the first twenty thousand I grossed from the mine. That money was paid long ago. I accused Rick of making false reports to Milt, but he swore the reports were accurate and that he merely guessed there was gold in the Comanche Chief. I suppose he has kicked himself many a time for letting me have it for the ten thousand."

"That is all past," said Mrs. Corey.

"I'm glad you feel that way about it," replied Steele. "Milt would never listen to me."

"They tell me you threw your kid out because he married Gladys Corey," reminded Hashknife.

Steele's leathery faced flushed.

"I did," he said at length. "Milt Corey was still alive, and I suppose I hated him for what he had said about me. I admit I didn't want Ken to marry Gladys. Not that Gladys wasn't too darn good for him, but because she was a Corey. I acted like a fool. Yes, I did, and I'll admit it now."

"Confession is good for the soul," murmured Mrs. Corey.

"I hope it helps mine." He turned to Hashknife.

"What do you think about the attack

on Judge Frazer last night?"

Hashknife shrugged his shoulders.

"What do you think?" he countered.

"I talked with the sheriff," replied Steele. "He's all muddled, and I'll admit I am. He spoke about Ryan's gun bein' loaded with blank cartridges; showed me the gun. He said you discovered it, and I remember you askin' him to keep the gun for evidence. He said you asked him to try and find out who was with Ken the night before Milt Corey was killed. Hartley, are you a detective?"

Hashknife smiled slowly.

"Mebbe the sheriff took me too seriously, Steele. Any one could discover the things I've pointed out to him. Two of the cartridges in Ryan's gun had been struck by the hammer. That was a simple thing to discover. Ken told his story of what happened the night before Milt Corey was killed; he said he was drunk, talked about killin' Ault, and remembers that somebody took his gun away. I told the sheriff to find out who got that gun; at least to find out who was with Ken and, if possible, to find out who left Painted Wells ahead of both Ken and Milt Corey."

"You mean they stole Ken's gun to throw the blame on him?"

"The man who eventually got Ken's gun was the man who killed Milt Corey. As I see it, he knew Ault was to loan that money. Ken says he saw Milt Corey in the saloon gettin' the money. He didn't want Corey to see him in town; so he got on his horse and headed for home. The man who had Ken's gun saw Ken ride past; so he used Ken's gun and left it for evidence."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Steele. "If you can prove who that man was, I'll give you five thousand dollars!"

Hashknife smiled grimly.

"Detectives don't last long around here."

"It begins to look that way, Hartley. Where in the world is Van Avery?"

"I reckon we'd all like to know that."

"Do you think he's a detective?" asked Steele.

"No, I don't reckon he is. Somebody thinks he is, though, that's a cinch."

"He was out to see me, and I showed him over the mine. He examined the safe and talked about Ryan, but he was more interested in Payzant."

"Interested in Payzant?"

"Quite a bit, it seems. He asked me all about how we found him and how long he had been dead, and if I felt sure he had been murdered."

"I don't believe he ever mentioned Payzant to me," said Hashknife.

"You didn't know anythin' about him, did you?"

"No, that's true. I didn't."

"Do you think Judge Frazer will live?" asked Mrs. Corey.

"Well, he's still alive, Mrs. Corey. They're rushin' a surgeon from Phoenix, I hear. I hired Frazer because he is a dandy criminal lawyer. I wanted the best for Ken. Now I'm stumped. Court convenes next week and there's a short docket, which means that Ken's case will start soon; and I haven't a lawyer for him."

Hashknife dug down in his pocket and drew out the piece of brown ore, which he handed to Steele.

"Does that look like anythin' to you?" he asked.

Silver Steele looked the piece over carefully, broke it with his fingers and looked closely at it. His eyes shifted to Hashknife.

"Where did you get that?" he asked.

"Picked it up," replied Hashknife, evading an answer.

"Up at the Comanche Chief?"

"Is it that good?" queried Hashknife indifferently.

Steele laughed shortly and handed it back to Hashknife.

"Comes pretty close to bein' jewelry ore," he said. "Know where there's any more of it?"

"Wish I did, if it's that good." Hashknife laughed. "I suppose somebody dropped it."

Steele shook hands with Mrs. Corey

and promised to come out again.

"Come out any time," she urged. "You are always welcome, Silver."

"It's good to hear you call me that again," he said, "and it will be good to come out here once in awhile."

Hashknife walked out to the horse with Steele.

"I know all about you and your pardner workin' out here for nothin'," he told Hashknife. "It's shore good of you. And I know about Van Avery bringin' out that load of stuff. Under the circumstances, I can't offer 'em anythin'; but you let me know when they're runnin' short and I'll make a philanthropist out of one of the boys."

Hashknife promised to let him know, then he went to the bunkhouse, where he sprawled on a bed and and blew smoke rings at the ceiling. Was that piece of ore really from that prospect hole, or had some higrader lost it there? He wondered. If Nelson had struck rich ore, why had he quit? Did Payzant examine the prospect and get killed for his curiosity, or was that prospect connected in some way with the killings?

Suddenly an idea struck him, and he sat up abruptly. Slowly he inhaled a mouthful of smoke, his eyes half closed. He got to his feet and went back to the stable, where he had left his saddled horse. Taking a small coil of half-inch rope, he rode back to the north line, tied the rope to a piece of the old windlass and went down to the bottom.

Hashknife knew little about formations, but his eyes were keen. He studied the pitch of the formation, dug out a few pieces with his knife, and crawled back up the rope. One of the pieces, not over half an inch thick, was the same as the piece he had shown Steele.

He coiled up the rope, whistling unmusically between his teeth. Then he rode back to the ranch.

"WHERE you been?" asked Sleepy, eyeing the coil of rope.

Hashknife tossed the rope around a post and slid from his saddle.

"Packin' a lynch rope?" asked Sleepy.

"Practisin'," said Hashknife.

"You ain't figurin' on lynchin' somebody, are you?"

"Oh, I reckon the law will be sufficient. Ain't it pretty near eatin' time?"

"Pretty near," replied Sleepy, regarding Hashknife quizzically. "No use askin' any questions, I don't reckon."

"Wait'll I git some answers, pardner."

Silver Steele's visit was the main subject of conversation at the supper table that evening. It made Gladys very happy to know that Ken's father felt differently about their marriage. In fact, it seemed to lift the depressed spirits of all the family.

Shortly after supper Gladys went upstairs to write some letters, and Elene asked Hashknife and Sleepy to stay and spend the evening with them in the living room. There was an old phonograph and a number of well worn records, which Sleepy proceeded to play. Elene told them of her short stay at a secretarial school in Chicago.

"I think I am glad that is over," she said. "A few months in the city was all I could stand."

"You don't belong there," Hashknife told her. "You can't transplant a yucca to a paved street and expect it to do well."

"Keep the cactus in Arizona." Elene laughed.

"Yeah, and the roses."

"Didja ever hear 'The Holy City'?" asked Sleepy. He had already played it twice in succession.

"Play 'Rancho Grande'," suggested Elene.

"Oh, yeah. That's the tum-tidy-um Mexican thing. Shore; that's *muy buena musica*. Wait'll I paw it out of this bunch."

Gladys came softly down the stairs, her eyes serious.

"There's somebody in the patio," she whispered. "I saw them from my window. Two men, I think."

Sleepy stepped away from the phono-

graph, but Hashknife motioned for him to start it going again. With the phonograph blaring out a military march, Hashknife and Sleepy went to the back door, which opened on the rear porch, or veranda, in the patio. Elene had run to a side window and peered out at the edge of the curtain. She turned and ran quickly to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"Some one on a horse," she whispered, "going toward the patio gate."

Hashknife hesitated, his hand on the latch, his head thrown up, listening.

From out in the patio came a yelp of fright or anger, the crash of a shot, followed by three more shots fired close together, and the snort of a frightened horse.

Hashknife flung the door open. He and Sleepy sprang out into the patio, guns in hand. A gust of wind blew the powder smoke into their nostrils. A horse ran in a circle, clattering over the flags of the patio, and came to a stop near the steps, snorting softly.

It was getting quite dark. Hashknife stepped out and grasped the horse by the bridle. There was enough light to see a man on the ground, trying to get up. Sleepy landed on him none too gently, while Hashknife quickly tied the horse and went to Sleepy's assistance.

The man was gasping and grunting, but they picked him up bodily and carried him into the house. They paused on the steps to hear the drumming of hoofs far off down the road.

"Well, we got one of 'em anyway," panted Sleepy.

"Who is it?" asked Elene anxiously.

"Wait'll we git him in to the light," replied Hashknife.

They carried him in and sprawled him on the floor, where he goggled up at them, his face dusty, his blond hair almost standing on end.

It was Cornelius Van Avery.

They all stood back and looked at him in amazement, while he pumped the air back into his tortured lungs.

"Where in the devil did you come from?" asked Hashknife.

Van Avery took a deep breath and smiled painfully.

"Phoenix," he whispered huskily. "Look!"

He opened his mouth and pointed at his teeth.

"Went down and got me a bridge."

"Oh, and we thought somebody had killed you!" exclaimed Elene.

They helped him to an easy chair. Elene got him a drink of water.

"What happened out there?" asked Hashknife.

"I don't know. You see, after I left here that day, I—I—well, I was mad about the way I talked. I knew everybody was laughing at me. So that evening I made up my mind. I didn't want anybody to know where I went; so I walked to Red Hill, took a night train to Phoenix and had a dentist build me a bridge. When I came back this morning I bought me a horse and saddle in Red Hill. I wanted to surprise you, so I came straight here. I rode in out there, and I thought it was Hashknife and Sleepy beside the porch. It wasn't very light, though. So I said, 'Hello, boys.'

"Somebody said, 'Look out!' and one of them fired a shot almost in my horse's face. Well—" Van Avery rubbed a sore knee—"the man in Red Hill, who sold me that horse, said he'd like to see anything make that horse buck. I wish he had been here awhile ago."

Van Avery looked around at them, a grin on his face.

"Did you miss me?" he asked.

"Blondy, you've upset the whole country," declared Sleepy.

"Oh, I'm sorry. But I just had to have that bridge. Notice I don't lisp? Wasn't that terrible?"

"Can you forgive me for laughing that day?" asked Elene.

"I certainly can."

"But who were those two men who shot at you out there?" asked Mrs. Corey anxiously. "I think that is of more importance right at present."

"They're gone," said Hashknife. "We heard them goin' down the road."

"Wasn't you scared?" asked Sleepy.

"I didn't have time." Van Avery smiled. "Did somebody catch my horse?"

"He's tied up out there."

"Good; I've still got transportation to Painted Wells."

"You'll not go to Painted Wells tonight," declared Elene. "You stay right here with us."

"Dear lady," said Van Avery seriously, "I hoped you would say that. Honestly, I do not believe I could ride another mile. The person who first conceived the idea of a human being riding a horse did not have me in mind. Somehow I do not fit."

"Anyway," said Sleepy, laughing, "you didn't have any gun to lose this time. Didja ever find the last one you lost?"

"No, but that doesn't matter; I shall get another."

Mrs. Corey gave Hashknife and Sleepy some extra bedding, and they went out to the bunkhouse to make a bed for Van Avery.

"Another close call, pardner," said Hashknife. "They was waitin' for us to come out."

Sleepy drew down the curtains in the bunkhouse before he lighted the lamp.

"Yeah, and I'm all goosepimples yet," he admitted. "Damn such a place!"

"Do you want to call it quits?"

"I should say not! By golly, now I'm sore!"

CHAPTER VII

A SPREE IN PAINTED WELLS

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy rode to town with Van Avery the next morning. Handsome almost pawed Van Avery off his horse, he was so glad to see him alive and well again. Van Avery explained why he went to Phoenix. Handsome roared with mirth.

"And here we had him all killed off! One mystery solved itself; and if I ain't mistaken the others will have to do the same, if they're ever solved. Doggone, I'm glad to see you, feller."

"Where's the sheriff?" asked Hashknife.

"Him? Oh, he's on the road to Porcupine, him and Doc Smedley, ridin' in a spring wagon."

"Somethin' happen in Porcupine?"

"No, not much. A feller accidently killed himself. You don't know Bill Neer, do you? He works for Steve McCord. Steve came in this mornin'. It seems that Bill was reloadin' some .45-70 ca'tridges, and one busted upon him, thereby leavin' him playin' a harp on a damp cloud."

"How the devil did he do that?" asked Hashknife.

"Experimentin', I reckon. Steve said it seemed that Bill was takin' a bullet out of a ca'tridge, or startin' to. He put the ca'tridge in a vise, and was a-goin' to draw out the bullet with a pair of nippers; but it seems that he accidently got the head of the shell into the vise and squeezed down upon her. You know, that'll shoot 'em off."

"And him standin' in front of it," said Sleepy. "That's a sure way of increasin' the angel population."

"Anyway," stated Handsome, "they've gone over to pronounce him dead and bring the body back."

"Goin' to bury him here?"

"Shore. No preacher in Porcupine or Red Hill now, and we've got the easiest diggin' graveyard of all three places."

Van Avery offered to buy a drink, so they all went over to the Yucca Saloon. Ed Ault, behind the bar, grunted explosively at sight of Van Avery.

"Where in the world did you come from?" he asked.

"Oh, I just took a little trip," said Van Avery. "I really did not intend to upset every one. You were away, too."

"I was down at Phoenix," replied Ault. "What will you have, gents?"

They named their drinks and Ault proceeded to fill their order.

"I've been in Phoenix," said Van Avery. "Nice place. Where do you stay while in Phoenix, Mr. Ault?"

Ault mentioned the biggest hotel in the city.

"I always stay there," he added.

Hashknife frowned thoughtfully over his drink, wondering why Van Avery should ask that question.

"I see you've got some new teeth," remarked Ault.

Van Avery laughed.

"I needed them badly. The next time any one shoots at me, I'm going to keep my mouth shut. At least I can save teeth."

"Didja shut it last night?" asked Sleepy.

"Lova gosh!" snorted Handsome. "You wasn't shot at agin, was you?"

The story was told, and Handsome ordered another round of drinks.

"There's a Jonah on this ship," he declared as he looked upon Van Avery with undisguised amazement. "Feller, you're hung with horseshoes, don'tcha know it?"

"Bullet proof," said Hashknife seriously.

"Ain't that the truth? Who knowed you was back, Blondy?"

"Nobody."

"But if they was gunnin' for you—"

"They wasn't," interrupted Hashknife. "Blondy jist happened to come along at the wrong time for a couple murderin' bushwhackers, who were waitin' for me and Sleepy to come out of the house."

"Lemme git this straight," said Handsome. "Why would a couple bushwhackers be waitin' for you and Sleepy?"

"Scared of us."

"Scared of you?"

"What have you done to scare anybody?" interjected Ault.

"Prob'ly made faces at somebody," said Sleepy dryly. "Some folks are shore touchy thataway. Is that whisky you're drinkin', Blondy? It is? How long have you been drinkin' whisky?"

"Since I came to Arizona," Van Avery answered cockily.

"Uh-huh! That's why your teeth come out easy."

They laughed and finished their drink, after which they wandered out into the street. Hashknife and Sleepy were going back to the ranch. Van Avery walked over to the horses with them.

"Do you remember the hotel Ault said he patronized in Phoenix?" asked Van Avery.

"Yeah," nodded Hashknife.

"Well, he didn't," replied Van Avery. "I looked through the register, thinking he might have registered there, but I couldn't find his name. I asked the room clerk, and he had never heard of Ault. Then I went to several of the better hotels, but he was not registered at any of them."

Hashknife adjusted his saddle carefully, finally turning to Van Avery.

"Why didja try to find him in Phoenix?"

"Curiosity," replied Van Avery seriously.

"Why do you tell me this?"

"I thought you might be curious, too."

"Uh-huh. Well, thanks, Blondy. Come out as soon as you can; you're always mighty welcome at the ranch."

"And don't drink too much of that embalmin' fluid," advised Sleepy.

Van Avery laughed and waved at them as they went down the street.

BLONDY VAN AVERY was not through drinking for the day. It was a rare thing for Handsome to take more than two or three drinks, but this seemed one of those rare times. He was supposed to stay at the office during the sheriff's absence, which he did—between drinks.

Van Avery insisted on buying all the drinks; and Handsome, who confessed that he never had more than two dollars and six bits at any one time, let Van Avery spend his money freely. But Van Avery shied away from the gambling tables. He played nickels in the slot machines, but that was as far as he would go on gambling.

It was about supper time when Handsome confessed to himself that he was drunk. He looked owl-eyed upon Blondy, who had developed a case of stuttering hiccoughs, but who was still steady

on his legs.

"I've gug-got to gug-git me a gug-gun," declared Van Avery.

"Tha's a pious thing for to do," agreed Handsome. "Git one with two han'les, and we'll both shoot it."

"Help me pup-pick one out, will you?" asked Van Avery.

Handsome cocked his sombrero over one eye. They went to Nelson's store, where Bush looked upon them with considerable apprehension. This was justified when Van Avery stated that he wanted to buy a new gun—with two handles, if possible.

"We both wan' shoot it," explained Handsome owlishly.

There were only two guns in stock; a pearl handed .45 Colt and a cheap, hammerless .32, commonly known as a suicide gun. After thirty minutes of argument over "muzzle v'locity" and "pen'tration", Van Avery took the .45. He had a belt full of ammunition in his room; so they wended their erratic way up to the room, and later appeared on the street, Van Avery wearing his new gun, fully loaded, in its hand tooled leather holster.

"Th' s'prisin' thing to me is that you can keep your feet," said Handsome.

"They're fuf-fastened on," explained Van Avery, after which they went into gales of laughter and hammered each other on the back.

They went back to the Yucca, where the bartender looked upon them with dread, especially when Van Avery insisted on taking out his gun and having Handsome explain its mechanics.

Ault had left the saloon, and no one was there except the bartender and his two jovial customers.

"You can't shoot thish gun, 'less you pull the trigger," explained Handsome.

"Have to pup-pull it?" queried Van Avery. "Couldn' you juj-jerk it?"

"You'd mish the targ't."

"I'd what?"

"Mish."

"You shound like you losh a tut-tooth, Handsome."

"Oh, whash use? You never hit nothin'. You couldn' hit that wall back there."

Bang! The bullet tore through a framed advertising picture, bored a hole through the wall, and probably went off across country. Van Avery staggered back, holding the gun in both hands, while the bartender, thankful to be alive, sprinted out through the rear door.

"Well," said Handsome critically, "I admit I'm wrong, Blondy. You did hit the wall. And you alsho chased the barten'er away. Tha's hard luck, 'cause I'm thirshty."

"That's easy to fuf-fix," gurgled Van Avery; he proceeded to go behind the bar.

Clumsily he slid out glasses and a bottle. Handsome was about to the point where another straw would break the camel's back. He drank another glass of liquor, looked upon the world with unseeing eyes and swung around with his back to the bar.

Van Avery did not drink this time. There was a sixshooter on a little shelf under the bar, and he picked it up. He looked at Handsome, who was wavering on his legs, shoved the gun inside his belt and went wobbling around the end of the bar.

"Wanna shing," declared Handsome sleepily.

Van Avery took him by the arm, and they went across the street like a pair of tugboats on a stormy sea.

They stumbled into the sheriff's office. Handsome sprawled full length on a cot and began to snore lustily. Van Avery sat down in the sheriff's chair, shut one eye and looked around the room. With a drunken scowl at the big safe in the corner, he got to his feet and went over to Handsome.

IT WAS after dark when the sheriff and coroner got back to town with the body of Bill Neer. It had been a hard day's work. The sheriff was in bad spirits. Handsome was snoring on the

cot, and the sheriff looked him over with a practised eye. He recognized the symptoms. The doctor had driven on down to his office with the body.

The sheriff stepped back in the jail and asked Ken if he had been fed. Ken hadn't; in fact, he wanted to know whether they were trying to starve him to death.

"Handsome's drunk as a shepherd," said Banty disgustedly. "He's a sweet specimen to leave in charge of anythin'."

The sheriff went back to the office and found Ault there.

"Your deputy kinda fell off the wagon today, didn't he?" accused Ault. "I don't like to put up a howl, but Handsome and that damn Van Avery shot a hole in my saloon wall, chased my bartender out of the place and helped themselves."

"Van Avery? You don't mean the kid that—"

"Didn't you know he came back today? He'd been away someplace to get his teeth fixed."

"Well, darn his hide! So he came back."

"And shot up my place," grunted Ault.

The sheriff shook his head wearily.

"I dunno. I guess it don't pay me to go away for the day. Wasn't any damage done, was there?"

"Just a hole in the wall and a scared bartender."

"That Van Avery beats hell," sighed the sheriff. "Where is he?"

"Gone to bed at the hotel. The last anybody heard of him, he was tryin' to sing 'The Dyin' Cowboy'."

Ault went back to the Yucca, and the sheriff proceeded to eat a meal and bring one to Ken. About two hours later, as the sheriff was preparing for bed, Doc Smedley came up to the office.

"Did you see Hartley?" he asked.

"No, I ain't seen him," replied the sheriff. "Is he in town?"

"He was down at my office when I got there. Asked me as a personal favor to dig the bullet out of Neer. I didn't want to do it, but he—he's a hard fellow to refuse. I said it didn't mean a thing, because Neer was killed accidentally; but he said somethin' about making a collection of bullets that killed folks in a queer way."

"Well, didja git it for him?" asked the sheriff.

"Wasn't any harm in it, was there, Banty?"

"Not if you was willin' to go to that trouble, Doc."

"Sure, I gave it to him. He said he didn't mind if I told you, but he said to not tell anybody else."

"He's a queer jigger, Doc. What in hell would he want of that bullet? We've got plenty evidence how Neer was killed."

"He said somethin' about a collection of bullets."

"That might be, Doc; some folks collect damn funny things."

"Well, I just wanted you to know about it."

"That's fine. Good night."

As the doctor turned to the door, Ault came in. He knew Bill Neer, and he wanted to know what arrangements had been made for the funeral.

"Goin' to bury him tomorrow, I suppose," said the sheriff. "Steve said he'd be over."

"Killed instantly, wasn't he?" asked Ault.

"Well, he didn't live long," replied the doctor. "That big bullet didn't have so much penetration, but enough to do the job. It wasn't battered up much.

"Did you dig it out?" asked Ault, rather perturbed.

"As a favor," said the doctor. "Hashknife Hartley said he was making a collection of bullets that kill folks in queer ways, and he wanted this one."

TO BE CONTINUED

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

TO ACCOMPANY "The Last Magician," his first story in our pages, John D. Swain sends in the following note to the Camp-fire. The present story is not by any means, however, the author's first published work, and some of you will recall no doubt that one of his stories won the O. Henry Memorial Award first prize in 1931.

New York, New York

Magicians have always fascinated me. Possibly because I am, in person, God's own gift to magicians, since almost any amateur can mystify me. Their hands are quicker than my eye! Possibly the fact that way back in Colonial times, a village witch in the hills of Connecticut put a spell upon an ancestor, who was the local Tithing Man, and hence as a child I listened to hair-raising stories of what happened to him and his young bride in an old house that burned only a few years ago; together with the even more terrifying things that took place in the night, under a full moon in his big yard—these may have helped along a natural curiosity as to hobgoblins, ghouls, haunts, spells, ghosts, and later on, professional mystifiers of the stage. Traveling in odd corners of the earth, I came to know a bit about ju-ju and medicine men and "conjurs" among primitives of several colors ranging from pale yellow to jet black. And I scraped acquaintance with several famous magicians.

Since, as aforesaid, I am easy to mystify, I should hesitate to record any of my own curious experiences; but I discovered that some of the great magicians of the stage, who willingly offer to bet that they can duplicate, or improve upon, the manifestations of any medium or seer or crystal gazer, nonetheless confess, though not for publication, that beyond their wonderfully clever illusions, there is something they can not explain. There are, in the most unlikely places, here and there men and women who, using no props whatever, having no manual dexterity, being in fact ofttimes crippled with age or rheumatism, can do strange things that they can not, or will not, explain. Primitive folk, who live close to the soil and breathe in unison with the ineluctable rhythm of Mother Nature, seem to possess secrets withheld from the sophisticated.

I have been the witness of some disturbing things, zigzagging through the years all the way from our own Southland to Morocco, with plenty of stop-overs. The story "The Last Magician" is inspired by fact, but does not purport to be an authentic instance. Some of the facts that have become known to me are so incredible that I should hesitate to ask any editor to print them. Perhaps the Camp-fire companions will be interested in this rhymed prophecy, attributed to Mother Shipton, who lived precariously several

centuries ago, and among other achievements, seems to have foreseen the World War, the airplane, the submarine, and moving pictures:

When pictures shall move and seem to be alive,
When men like fish beneath the sea shall dive
Or, like the eagle, soar aloft in air,
HALF OF THE WORLD SHALL PERISH IN DESPAIR!
—JOHN D. SWAIN.

A READER comments on the "vicious deer" newspaper item recently quoted in these columns:

Bruces Crossing, Michigan

In the Camp-fire of *Adventure* for Oct. 15th appears a letter from Raymond O. Watts along with a clipping from the Bent County (Colorado) *Democrat* describing an unusual occurrence—a deer with both front legs broken chasing a one armed hunter up into a tree. A reply by Ernest W. Shaw follows wherein he evinces skepticism as to the ability of a man with one arm to climb a tree.

I had intended writing this long before now. But the matter slipped my mind. About eleven years ago I had an experience that resembled the one set forth in the clipping. Except for the situations being somewhat reversed, the incidents strike me as being quite a lot alike. Instead of being chased up a tree, I climbed up into a hemlock to get a better view of a runaway. The time was about sundown.

Darkness had gathered and I could scarcely make out the trail I was watching. I was about to give up and go home when the shadowy outline of a deer moving noiselessly down the trail caught my eye. It stopped about 80 feet from where I was stationed. As I had only a 12 gauge shotgun loaded with buckshot, I would have to get it in the head. In the dark I could not make out the exact proximity of its head. At last I decided it must be eating grass along the trail, so I shot low. The animal began bouncing about in a manner like that of a football bouncing over a rough piece of ground. Its actions puzzled me. It appeared determined to get away in a hurry, but succeeded only in flopping about in a circle. It was now too dark to fire from my position again with any degree of accuracy, so I slid down the tree, reloaded my gun and approached my quarry, which began to bleat piteously as it threshed about. I found both front legs broken at the knees. I finished it with a wallop back of the ears with a club. It was a buck weighing about 150 pounds.

I HAVE only one arm. I smashed my right arm in a sawmill accident when I was 16 years of age. It had to be amputated at the shoulder. I have climbed many trees. But it never occurred to me that there were those who considered tree climbing a feat bordering on the impossible for a one-armed man until I read brother Shaw's letter.

The experience I have outlined leads me to believe that the portion of the clipping pertaining to the deer chasing the man until he was obliged to take to a tree for refuge is a highly embellished fabrication. But it is not a difficult task for a man with one arm to climb a tree. It's all in getting used to doing such things, and doesn't require as much effort as one may suppose.
—E. H. HIMANKA

THE motto of the O'Sullivans, and the origin of the name:

Gulfport, Mississippi

I have noticed for several issues of *Adventure* the discussion pro and con in regard to the translation of the O'Sullivan motto. So far I have hesitated to enter a controversy which any Gaelic Leaguer could settle offhand. However, as one who speaks, reads and writes the Gaelic, I offer a few remarks on the subject which, I hope, will settle the dust.

I happen to have in my possession a plate containing, among others, the arms of the O'Sullivan family. This, stripped of the technicalities of heraldry, is as follows: A silver shield upon which is emblazoned a left hand cut off at the wrist, holding erect a sword. The crest consists of a robin redbreast perched on a ducal coronet, holding in its beak a sprig of laurel. Below the shield is displayed the motto: *"Lamh foistenach an uachtar."*

THE difference between Gaelic and English is so great that it is almost impossible to transliterate a sentence from one language in the other and still make sense. I believe, however, that much of the controversy regarding the motto has been caused by the word *"foistenach."* This word is now obsolete, being from Middle Irish and having in the course of centuries become "foighdeach," meaning in English "patient." Therefore, the approximate translation in English of *"Lamh foistenach an uachtar"* would read: "The patient hand uppermost."

Sir Bernard Burke's translation, presented by Mr. Lynde Sullivan, may have been the Latin approximation of the above motto adopted by one branch of the O'Sullivan family which "went the way of the foreigner and forgot their Gaelic manners." Burke's translation: "What we gain by conquest we keep by chivalry" would read, if translated into Gaelic: *"Cad a thogamidh le gabhaltas coimeadainn le ceart."* In addition to this there is still another translation of the motto given by O'Hart: "The hand of friendship is still firm." Doubtless this also is from a Latin translation of the original motto. If translated into Gaelic it would be approximately: *"Ata an lamh caradais neamhtar fos."*

AN EXPLANATION of these last will be found in the fact that many of the Irish clans who took sides with the Normans discarded their Gaelic mottoes and adopted Latin translations of the same. But the correct motto of the O'Sullivan clan—O'Suilebhain Bheare, O'Suilebhain Maol and O'Suilebhain Mor—has remained to this day: *"Lamh foistenach an uactar*—The patient hand uppermost."

A few facts concerning the origin of the name Sullivan might be of interest to some members of the circle: The root of the word is derived from the Gaelic word for eye, *"suil."* This word was in turn derived from the Early Gaelic word for the sun, which in modern Gaelic is *"grian."* As the day now called Sunday was in pre-Christian Ireland and Scotland known as *"Dia Suil,"* instead of *"Dia Domhnaigh,"* as at present, it is reasonable to assume that Suilebhain, son of Fingin, son of Aodh Dubh (Black Hugh), one time king of Munster, was born on a Sunday, hence the name.

—NEIL MARTIN

ODD quirks in State game laws:

Franklin, New Jersey

Owen A. Hoyt, of Michigan, in the April 15th issue of *Adventure* asked about hunting in Michigan with bow and arrow. A reply by Earl B. Powell contained the statement that every State of the Union with the exception of Arizona allowed the use of bow and arrow, but that State by an asinine law prohibited same. He should look up the law of New Jersey, which if that of Arizona is asinine, is double distilled in that regard, for the method of hunting provided by the laws of New Jersey specify by gun held at arm length; then they also specify that it shall be illegal at all times, except in the open season for deer, to have any missile larger than No. 2 shot in your possession in the field or woods, and in the open season for deer shall have no missile larger than buckshot, nor any smaller. The deer season comes after the close of the upland game, although the duck season is still on.

Such a law as this makes it illegal to hunt woodchucks in New Jersey, except with shotgun; also legally does away with squirrel hunting with rifle, which was the training ground for a race of riflemen.

A NUMBER of years ago I had our Representative in the Assembly introduce an amendment legalizing the shooting of small game with small bore rifle, which would have allowed squirrel hunting and woodchucks with rifle, but the asinine Game Commission begged him to withdraw, which with my permission he did, as it hardly paid to antagonize them.

This prohibition of rifle shooting, along with such laws as the Sullivan Law of New York, only serve more and more to put the people at the mercy of gangsters and such ilk as have no respect for the law whatever. Take the shooting of woodchucks: Is there a farmer who would not welcome any riflemen to his farm and grant a day of real sport and thereby rid the farmer of a pest? Of course there is plenty of woodchuck hunting done in New Jersey, but it all is without the law. One friend killed eleven in one field for a farmer last year, and had a record of ninety-seven for the season, with a 25-20, open sights—not bad shooting and a world of sport.

—R. T. LAYTON.

ON THE occasion of his first story in *Adventure*, "The Stranger from Boston," in this issue, Reece Hague rises to address the members of the Camp-fire:

Alberta, B. C., Canada

Although this issue marks my first appearance as a contributor of fiction to *Adventure*, I don't feel altogether like an interloper breaking into the Camp-fire circle; for with many of its members I long ago became acquainted in the capacity of Ask Adventure expert for certain of the northern sections of Canada. When, several years ago, I found it necessary to give up the Ask Adventure work on returning to my native Australia, the break seemed like a bereavement. Now that I am again somewhat diffidently appearing in *Adventure* in a new capacity it savors, to me at least, of a delightful reunion.

Some of you may wonder what the devil an Australian was doing in the first place posing as an authority on Northern Canada, and I can imagine doughboys among you remarking, "It's just like an Aussie to have the gall to try and write snow country stories."

However, I do know quite a bit about Northern Canada and this is how it came about:

AFTER accompanying a number of my fellow countrymen over to Europe to join in the fracas which occurred there a few years ago, instead of returning home immediately after hostilities were concluded I remained in London for a time to help organize a commercial publicity campaign for the Australian government. Then one day in the spring of 1919 a mining engineer friend dropped in to tell me he was heading for the Hudson Bay region, to look over a prospect for an English company, a few days hence. He invited me along.

It didn't take me long to decide that there were a lot of Diggers wandering aimlessly around London just as competent as I and probably more so. I sailed for Canada.

The six months I had intended to remain in the Dominion stretched out to over six years. During most of that period I made my headquarters at The Pas, Northern Manitoba, and spent my time participating in gold rushes, helping to put The Pas 200-Mile Dog Derby on the map, writing innumerable articles for a variety of publications and answering queries from correspondents regarding whether or not Northern life was all it was cracked up to be.

EVENTUALLY I did return to the Antipodes; but after three years there decided I was thawed out sufficiently to take a chance on the Dominion again. On arrival back I added to my knowledge of the North by an extended trip through the mineral areas of British Columbia, including the Alaska boundary country.

There are still quite a few sections of the North I haven't yet visited; but if any of them are the scene of a mineral rush, this may be rectified. For my wife informs me I have developed into one of those unfortunates who simply can't stay put if some other guy is doing a bit of staking in another part of the country.

—REECE HAGUE.

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Coin

HOW the Prophet's Hegira can mislead a collector of the Sultan's currency.

Request:—"I have an old copper coin dated 1304. It has English lettering on one side: Sultanate of Brunei. In center is a figure 1. On other side a star in center surrounded by marks that I don't understand. Is there any value to it on account of its age?"

—L. T. OUTHIER, St. Helens, Oregon

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—Your coin dated 1304 was made in England for use in the Sultanate of Brunei on the Island of Borneo. The date 1304 is in the Mohammedan form of reckoning, which corresponds to 1886 of our era. It is still a current coin, and in this country is worth at the most only a few cents.

Madagascar

NO PLACE for a secretary or a dietician, even if she speaks Malagasy.

Request:—"We are very much interested in opportunities in Madagascar. One of us is a dietician and the other a secretary, both thoroughly trained in our respective lines of work. Your information will be greatly appreciated."

—MARGARET L. MEADE,
—ANITA H. ASHMEAD,
Kingston, Pennsylvania

Reply, by Mr. Ralph Linton:—I feel sure that there would be no possibility of your obtaining positions in Madagascar at the present time. The conditions there are quite primitive even in the few large towns. I doubt whether there are a dozen people in the island, French officials included, who ever heard of a dietician, and there are no institutions which would be likely to employ one.

There is some secretarial work, but this is done by educated natives who work for extremely small wages, the maximum salary being about $30.00 a month at the present rate of exchange. A thorough knowledge of both French and Malagasy would be a prerequisite for such a position. Moreover, times are very hard there also, with many good and experienced people out of work.

Due to the French colonial policy it is difficult for foreigners to settle in Madagascar, and the chances for white women to get work of any sort there are almost nil. I strongly advise you against trying anything of the sort.

Indian

HAS any one ever seen a full blooded Indian with a full grown beard?

Request:—"1. Something that has puzzled me for a long time is this: I have never seen a picture of an American Indian with a bearded face. Are Indians naturally smooth faced, or do they eradicate their whiskers at an early age?

2. Is the Ghost Dance limited to certain tribes or localities? What is its significance?"

—OSWALD B. PRYOR, Corrinal, Australia

Reply, by Mr. H. F. Robinson:—1. Most male Indians would have a moderate mustache and some chin beard if they would allow them to grow; but as it would in most cases be ragged, they generally pluck the hairs out. I have seen a few Indians with mustaches, but I do not remember ever seeing a full-blood with a beard. Hair over the body is considerably less than in the average white.

2. The Ghost Dance you ask about is not something that is general or confined to any one tribe. It was a religious excitement in the late eighties and early nineties of the last century. It was a ceremonial religious dance connected with the messiah doctrine—that is with a belief that an Indian messiah would come who would knit all of the Indians together and drive out all of the whites, restoring the Indians to their former state and independence. It originated among a

little tribe in the State of Nevada about 1888 and rapidly spread among the other tribes, until almost all of the tribes in the inter-mountain district were involved.

It started with a young Paiute Indian, who was about 35 at the time, but already had quite a reputation as a medicine man. His name was Wovoka, I believe, and I saw in the papers within a week a notice of his death. It seems that he was attacked by a dangerous fever, and while sick he became unconscious for some time. Just then there was an eclipse of the sun which created some excitement among the Indians. While he was delirious he imagined he had been taken to the spirit world and there he received a direct revelation from the god of the Indians that the new dispensation was at hand when the Indians would be restored to their former rights, and that their dead friends would return to earth, and that they must prepare for the event by practising the songs and dance ceremonies which he received in this revelation and on his recovery gave to his people.

It was adopted by the tribe, and in a short time it had spread to the adjoining tribes, and was known as the Spirit or Ghost dance. The dancers, men and women, danced together, held hands in a large circle, facing toward the center, singing songs given them, without any accompaniment. Later in other tribes they accompanied the singing with drums and rattles.

Among the Sioux, about the time this religious excitement reached them, local trouble was aggravated; and it led to the killing of Sitting Bull, while he was being arrested as a trouble maker. The Indians going on the warpath and troops being called in resulted in the battle of Wounded Knee, Dec. 29, 1890. Indian women took part in this. The result was really a massacre, with many killed and wounded.

When the dances were in vogue hypnotic trances were a great feature, and the self-hypnotized dancers would usually prophesy further matters in connection with the coming of the messiah. The doctrine has now died out, but the dance in a modified form is still practised as a social ceremony.

It might interest you to know that about 1905 I was with the Piegan Indians for about a year, and lived in camp among them. One Sunday morning I came out of my tent in a pair of light blue pajamas, to get some wood for my fire. An old Indian passed, laughed at my garb and inquired, "Is that your Ghost Dance suit?"

I gravely told him that it was, and he thought it a good joke and spread the story through the camp. And ever after, while I was with them, my name was Ghost!

State Police

IN NEW YORK would-be troopers are not allowed to see old exam questions.

Request:—"I am writing to you for advice on how best to prepare myself for the New York State Troopers' examinations which I shall take this Spring. Would it be possible to secure a copy of a previous mental exam?"

—JOHN E. MOORE, New York City

Reply, by Mr. Francis H. Bent:—Captain George P. Dutton informs me that they do not give out copies of old examinations. The exams are changed every year. All I can tell you is that the exam is of a general nature to show your education and intelligence—with emphasis on the intelligence. You will likely be asked why you wish to be a trooper, what you believe to be the duties of a trooper, how a trooper should act toward the public, and questions along that line. There are also likely to be some questions concerning horsemanship, nomenclature of equipment, etc—enough to show that you know something about horses and riding. And that's about all there is to it.

Sorry I can't be of greater help, but the officers desire that the applicants do not brush up and "cram" particularly for the examination, as might be the case if they knew just what was coming.

Sid Hatfield

A WEST VIRGINIA character who comes to mind in connection with quick shooting and double action revolvers.

Request:—"I am in search of information about something that happened in your State.

I am an expert revolver shot and am an assistant of Mr. Ed McGivern, the world's champion revolver shot. McGivern uses a double action revolver .38 caliber and prefers the S. & W. By long practise he has developed his fingers, using the double action feature of the arm—never cocking it—until he has reached, one can safely say, extreme accuracy. I have never known a man who can even approach his accuracy and still retain his best speed. The best speed of the ordinary expert revolver shot, with all shots on the target, is considerably slower than anything McGivern attempts. He can fire five shots, double action, in 2/5 of a second and group them under a dime, this at twenty feet.

The question was recently put to me:

'Did you ever know a pistol shot who was really a double action shot who could shoot a double action with any degree of accuracy without first cocking the arm?'

It is true that nearly all Western gunmen used the single action. I also have been partial to that weapon in past years. But I do know of a gunfighter who could use a gun double action and he made practical use of it. This is where you come in, for I think you will know him also.

I refer to Sid Hatfield. Do you have any details of the fight between him and the Baldwin-Felts men at a railroad station in West Virginia? If I remember right, he was placed under arrest and they were waiting for the train when the fight started. It seems to me there were about five men killed. Every man that Hatfield killed was shot in the head, and he was using a pair of double action Colts.

If possible I would like to know the time taken by the fight. I have heard it was seven minutes, time fixed by the train being late. Of course it was much shorter than that; it would have to be for Sid to live. I would like to know the make, model and caliber of his guns, and how

many men were killed by Sid and by the Baldwin-Felts. I remember that at least one bystander was killed and Hatfield married that man's widow. Any other dope on Hatfield up till the time of his murder will be appreciated."

—PINK SIMMS, Lewistown, Montana

Reply, by Mr. Lawrence Edmund Allen:—Sid Hatfield had an enviable reputation as a gunman, but his ability was somewhat exaggerated, as the following facts will disclose:

Hatfield was chief of police at Matewan on May 19, 1920, when private detectives of the Baldwin-Felts agency were sent there to evict miners from houses of the Stone Mountain Coal Corporation.

A party of twelve detectives were attacked that evening while en route to the railroad station after they had gone to a hotel and packed their guns in their suitcases. Ten persons, including seven of the detectives, were killed and several persons were wounded.

The detectives were shot down and fell in the street in a heap. Nearly 200 shots were fired, the shots coming from various directions. Seven detectives were struck by 20 bullets, with three of the bullets striking Detective A. C. Felts. There was evidence of attack other than by gunfire, as one of the officers had a broken leg and the face of another was caved in, indicating that he had been kicked or trampled upon. Those killed were Detectives Lee C. Felts, A. C. Felts, E. O. Powell, A. J. Booker, J. W. Ferguson, L. N. Brown and P. B. Cunningham. Mayor Cabell Testerman, of Matewan, Robert Mullens, a miner, and a boy also were shot to death.

ONE story was that Detective A. C. Felts had become involved in an altercation with Mayor Testerman and shot the mayor, and general shooting followed. Hatfield, as chief of police, of course was supposed to have played a major part in the shootings; but the story that he, personally, killed five of the officers by shooting them in the head is seriously discounted here and I can find nothing to substantiate it.

Hatfield married the widow of the mayor less than two weeks after the murders.

In the Summer of 1921 Hatfield and Ed Chambers, who was a policeman, were arrested and faced charges in connection with the shooting up of the town of Mohawk several months previously. On August 1, 1921, both appeared at the courthouse at Welch, in McDowell County, for trial.

Just before noon, Hatfield and Chambers both were shot to death in a gunfight in the courthouse yard. C. E. Lively, a Baldwin-Felts private detective, and four others were arrested in connection with the shooting. Hatfield and Chambers had become involved in a quarrel with Lively and some of his friends, and the shooting had followed.

Before the shooting up of the town of Mohawk and subsequent to the mass murder of the detectives at Matewan, Hatfield, who was charged with leading the people of the town in the battle against the detectives, and twenty-two others were indicted but acquitted. At that time he was reputed to have made the statement that he would "get" Lively.

Chambers, just past twenty-one, and the youngest of the defendants in the Matewan battle trial, and Hatfield prided themselves on their ability to "draw quick and hit the mark." They died together on the courthouse steps at Welch, Hatfield being shot four times through the body and once through the face. Chambers was shot in the head and chest.

Two guns were found on Hatfield, one of which contained empty shells. Chambers had one gun, from which one of the shells had been fired. The killing of Hatfield made his wife a widow for the second time in less than two years.

In 1921, the Welch territory was still what might be termed comparative "wild lands" and the news services were not only slow but necessarily lacking in the detail with which a clear picture of the Matewan battle might be obtained. I do not know the exact time of the battle, but seven minutes is fairly accurate. As for the make, model and caliber of Hatfield's guns, I am sorry that I can not advise you.

Incidentally, Chambers's widow later worked in the office of Harold W. Houston, a Charleston lawyer, interested in the mine strike troubles, who married her. In a conversation with Mrs. Houston recently, in which she talked of the Matewan battle and the killing of her first husband, she said that Hatfield used a Smith and Wesson .38 caliber long barrel, nickelplated gun, and also a blue-steel .44 caliber short barrel, single action. She said that she did not know of Hatfield's having any double action guns. I'm passing this information along to you for whatever it's worth.

It's immaterial now, but Chambers's widow said that neither her husband nor Hatfield were armed when they were shot to death.

I neglected to mention that Hatfield, along with the twenty-two others, was indicted for the seven murders of the detectives at Matewan. As far as I can determine, it has never been established that Sid killed five of the officers.

In connection with the history of Sid Hatfield, I wish to recommend to you the book, "The Devil's Brigade," written by Jack Spivack.

Semi-precious Stone

GEODES, which have bubbles of water sealed within them.

Request:—"I have a piece of grayish material, like chalcedony, with water hermetically sealed within. The size is about 4"x1½". I believe this stone is pretty rare. Could you please tell me what it is?"

—GUSTAV CHRISTIANSEN, Brooklyn, New York

Reply, by Mr. F. J. Esterlin:—What you describe in your letter is what is called a geode. The formation is not rare. It occurs in many places, although yours is pretty good size. Those found on the Pacific coast are usually half the size of the one you have.

When sawed in half these geodes reveal a cavity, the walls of which are studded with glittering little crystals which sparkle like little diamonds. These were formed by the water of crystallization.

Specimens containing as much as a teaspoonful of water, while not common, are not exactly rare.

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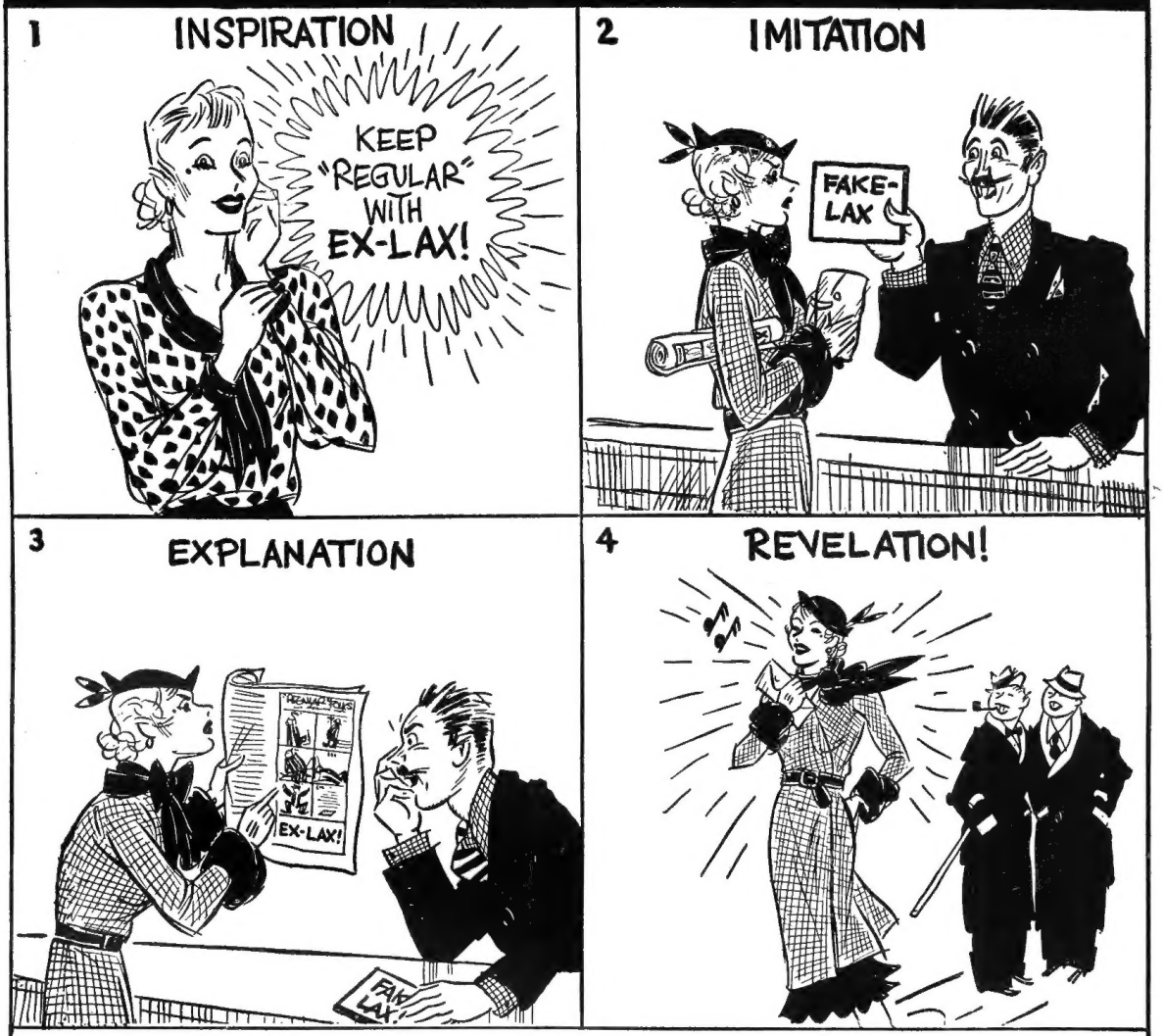

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SOURCE: *"Illustrated Magic" by Ottokar Fischer, translated and edited by J. B. Mussey and Fulton Oursler, The Macmillan Company, New York.*

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